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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

PARENTS AND CONTROL OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL WORK BEHAVIOR

by

© CHARLES HENRY PAYNE

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING, 1987

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ABSTRACT

Parents are normally the most important environmental influence on elementary school principals' work behavior. The study explores and describes this phenomenon and the tripartite relationship in which parental influence is part of the school district's principal control system.

Perceptions of organizational participants in one large city school district provided data on whether parent influence is significant; manifested in principal behavior and school operations; encouraged and facilitated by the district; and exercised through various means. Six trustees, nine senior administrators, forty two principals and 104 teachers responded to a questionnaire. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with thirty eight respondents and documents analyzed.

The data were examined through analytic frameworks focussing on perceptions about parent influence, principals, superordinates and parents. Fifty four derived propositions were the basis for conclusions.

Parent influence, exerted in many ways, is an inadequately recognized part of administrators' reality. The influence is strong and growing, ranging from the particular to monitoring conformity to societal norms. Principal behavior manifests parental influence. Schools and teachers are affected because the principal largely determines what occurs in the school and partly through the balance established amongst superordinate, parent and teacher influences.

As part of the district's control system, superordinates make clear, directly and indirectly, that principals should be appropriately responsive to parents. Superordinates encourage parent influence, but do little to shape its direction.

Because parents regard their expectations as important, principals, who feel vulnerable, try to reflect them. Parents want to exert influence through the principal.

Some are more influential than others.

The common understanding of loose coupling is misleading. Nine conceptual lens proved helpful. Effective principalling involves a contingency approach to leadership, in which self-interest motivates use of recognized and unrecognized discretion in an interactive context to achieve the best balance of influences. Schools are vulnerable or sensitive to environments which should be defined more exactly as major influences. Parents monitor thresholds that maintain schools' community legitimation.

The influence attributed to parents should be formally recognized in accountability and partnership. District control can be achieved by building a climate of common expectations of schools. Extensive training for all parties will be necessary.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study is an examination of the tripartite relationships that exist among parents, principal and superintendent, or among the parent community, the school and the school system. They are important relationships. Achieving the best balance in these relationships has been an intermittent concern of society and educators since the beginnings of public education, and is currently a focus of government attention in Alberta, with the proposals for a new school act, as well as in similar societies such as the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia. Giving added importance to the study of these relationships is the growing recognition in school effectiveness research that more effective schools have distinctive patterns of school-parent and school-district interaction.

In one of the best regarded reviews of the research on school effectiveness (c.f. Rossmiller,1986), Purkey and Smith (1983) gleaned nine organization/structure variables and four process variables. These variables interact in a symbiotic manner to produce a "culture resulting in a distinct climate composed of attitudes, behaviors, organizational structure, and so on, that is influential in determining the school's effectiveness," (Purkey and Smith, 1982). Three of the organization/structural variables they identified are among those with which this study is concerned: (a) a high degree of autonomy for school-site management; (b) closely involved, well informed and supportive parents; and (c) strong school system support. It is significant that these three variables resemble those characteristics of excellent companies, described by Peters and Waterman (1984) as (a) autonomy and entrepreneurship, (b) staying close to the customer, and (c) simultaneous loose-tight properties involving dedication to central values.

The school effectiveness research has also focused attention on the critical leadership function of the school principal. Yet the principal's key role in linking parents, school and district, as well as in balancing parental expectations, system goals and school objectives, has received, as Morris et al. (1984:110) point out, little attention:

> There has been little research on the dynamics of the school-community relationship from a managerial perspective. Although the local school is now recognized as the key point of contact between the school system and its surrounding environment, evidence of important interaction between the principal and the local school clientele is in short supply.

Moreover, there has been some difficulty in accommodating to traditional theorizing a small, but growing, number of research-derived insights. Conventional thinking has, for example, held that parents are denied any significant influence on the schools their children attend and that their role in school governance does not extend beyond the 'tokenism' of Arnstein's (1964) ladder of citizen participation. Yet, some recent research, particularly that involving the realities of principals' work and work behavior (e.g. Morris et al.,1984 and Peterson,1984), and studies of school systems as organizations (e.g. Meyer et al.,1978 and White,1983), indicates a more complex relationship in which parents may be more influential in shaping the reality of school life than is commonly recognized. The work behavior of the key actor, the principal, may, through a variety of means, be constrained and channelled by parental influence.

Furthermore, parental influence may be part of the complex means by which the school system controls the work behavior of principals. In ensuring that principals are responsive to parental influence, the school system is, in effect, using an indirect (and perhaps unrecognized) mechanism for control of principal behavior.

These indications of the importance of the subject, and the recognized inadequacies of research and theorizing on parents/principal/superintendent relationships, are the basis for pursuing this study through further empirical research. A more accurate and fuller understanding of the tripartite relationships is needed. This study explores parental influence on principals who are seen as increasingly the key actors in shaping individual schools, partly because of the discretion both inherent in their position and increasingly afforded them by school systems. Parents have influence either directly, through formally provided means (e.g. advisory committees, policies), or indirectly because of the observations, beliefs and expectations that constitute, for the principal, the reality of the work world. Parental influence may be, in effect, a control over principal work behavior, promoted, both consciously and unconsciously, by the principal's superordinates.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

In order to investigate the parents-principal-system relationship from a control perspective, a research problem was formulated.

Statement of the Problem

The basic research problem was to determine whether parental influence constitutes a significant control over principal behavior and whether this constraint on principal discretion is fostered by the principal's superordinates.

Major Questions

To examine this problem, a number of major questions were formulated to guide the development of the research and establish a rationale for data collection.

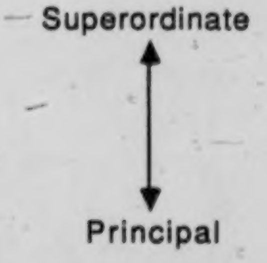
1. Do parents exercise a significant influence on the work behavior of principals?
2. Does principal behavior manifest the influence of parents and is this important for the school?

3. Does the school system, directly and indirectly, ensure that principal behavior is responsive to parents?
4. What are the means through which parents influence principal work behavior?

Because the concept of control is not in common use in educational administration, some further discussion of the perspective adopted is warranted.

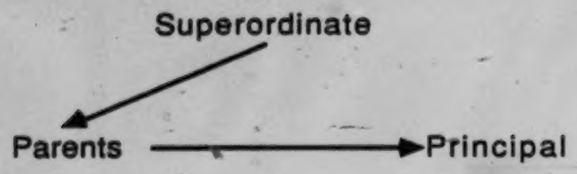
PERSPECTIVE

The traditional line organization depicts the principal as under the direct control of the immediate superordinate or, in some school systems, a number of superordinates according to function.



The line points both ways because of the interactive nature of the relationship. That is, the principal also influences the superordinate, such as in "managing the boss", and because some theories emphasize that control is something conceded by the subordinate. This 'reverse' relationship was not a major focus of this study, but the data did lead to an appreciation of the interactive nature of influence relationships.

Most control mechanisms operate in a direct relationship but developments in school administration have tended towards less direct control, especially as some of the most important responsibilities of the principal are not amenable to direct supervision. This study is concerned with an indirect control as represented below.



The importance of these relationships is attested by Morris et al. (1984:132) who claim that among principals, "There is a consensus that only two groups of people matter to the principal: the external clients, the parents or community at large; and the internal school bureaucracy, including the central office administrators."

The objective of the study was to determine whether parents act as a control mechanism over principal behavior and whether their influence is encouraged by superordinates in order to constrain principal behavior. The expectation that principals will pursue parental support may be emphasized directly through such things as principals' job descriptions, policy statements, exhortation. It may also be emphasized indirectly. For example in a British Columbia study, Kelsey (1983) examined over 200 reports written on principals and found "community support" the most frequent subject of comment. Such an emphasis in principal assessment carries a clear implication for principals.

Parents may have influence over principals because of the importance given by superordinates or the school system to the school's having community (parental) support. For example, parents may be perceived by principals as being an important source of information in their personal evaluation or the evaluation of their school. Such evaluations can lead to rewards or sanctions for the principal. Duke and Stiggins (1985) found that principals thought informal inputs from parents, teachers and other school personnel were the most important sources of evidence in their evaluation. Drawing upon Peterson's work (1983,1984), they point out that the reason most observers conclude there is little supervision of principals may be because of a failure to recognize the importance of "supervisory visits by non-hierarchical influentials" responsible for "extraorganizational" monitoring (p.98). Similarly, one of Blumberg and Greenfield's (1980:179) principals commented: "Anyone who is really aware of what happens to them on the job as principal will recognize very quickly that even having your hand in the pocket of somebody downtown will never save you if a parent group goes down there."

What people perceive is the reality that guides their decision making. Regardless of the actual part played by parents in principal evaluation and whether that part is overt or covert, principal behavior may be controlled if principals feel they have to demonstrate parental support in order to benefit from whatever rewards the system offers, such as recognition, promotion, transfer, or retention. They will shape their behavior in order to ensure they have that support. This may be why Wolcott (1973:208) found that principals place great value on autonomy but that they achieve it by keeping to a minimum the dissatisfaction that might threaten it. Similarly, Grainger (1984:327) concluded that maintenance of the "zone of satisfaction" is one of the most complex and demanding tasks for the principal. The confidence of the parents in his study that they could influence the school when necessary indicates responsiveness by the principal.

The principals in Grainger's study claimed that parents influenced them through countless informal contacts. This suggests other ways in which the control may operate. Principals may, for example, use parents to evaluate their own performance and that of the school. They may seek feedback from parents in order to monitor the results of their own behavior and to identify the need for corrective action. They may "sound out" parents for possible reaction before introducing a change. Thus Morris et al. (1984:116) claim their study indicates principals regarded parents as the "pre-eminent judges" of success or failure -- a belief reflected in the "high intensity" of their exchanges with parents, infrequent as they might be.

A third aspect of the control mechanism in operation may be seen in a generally unstated, but well known, expectation that principals will "buffer" their superordinates from the community, or reduce environmental uncertainty. The school system expects principals to settle parental problems at the school level and this includes ensuring parental support for system policies. When superordinates have to get involved in school/parent problems or when district policies are not accepted by parents, then the principal may be held responsible, or principals may believe their standing in the eyes of important superordinates is affected. Principals are expected, by their superordinates, to manage the school's parents and this gives the parents potential to influence.

Principals are susceptible to influence from parents for a variety of reasons and school system encouragement of parental influence on principals constitutes a control over principal behavior. This perspective has potential importance for both practice and theory.

JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY

This study can be justified on both theoretical and practical grounds. In the first place, it links practice and theory because, as Greenfield (1986:43) points out, "Administrators know administration; scientists don't. The point of such inquiry would be to enable scientists to come to know what administrators know and to bring a fresh and questioning perspective to it." In this study, not only formally designated administrators contributed their perceptions, but also others who play a part in administration or are affected by it.

However, while the study was exploratory, it was not undertaken without some prior general formulations concerning the relationships among parents, principal and superordinates. Sargent and Belisle (1957:3) describe this approach: "Checking general ideas or formulations against the reality of situations both helps to illuminate the concepts and theories and to guard against losing contact with the 'stuff' -- the reality of administration."

Historically, a major and recurring concern in the study of administration has been with the theory of control. As Renihan (1977) points out, however, the concept remains problematic and one of the least understood areas of managerial activity. These difficulties and the niceties of professionalism may explain its neglect in contemporary educational administration literature. Miklos (1975:3) drew attention to the changing ideology which saw "functions such as controlling and commanding . . . replaced by stimulating or influencing." In investigating an aspect of control this study pursued a subject of recognized importance to practitioners and scholars, and, in dealing with a particular aspect, it contributes to a better understanding of control in educational systems.

The theoretical significance is illustrated by a series of studies culminating with Ewanyshyn (1986). These studies demonstrated a continuing shift of decision-making control in school systems to principals. But the researchers did not investigate whether the enhanced discretion given to principals is unfettered, although March (1981:16) does allude to the possibility: "Although a decision may be taken at a particular point, it will be affected by the balance achieved among the degrees of control arising from other parts of the organization." One group of others, for the principal, is the parents, and this study explores their contribution to the balance of control. Principals are not free agents -- their behavior is motivated and constrained by a mix of controls which have not yet been fully described.

Filling gaps in knowledge is the essence of research and theory building. As Kerlinger (1947 : 7) describes the task: "The scientist's job is to discover new facts and add them to the already existing body of information." This study was concerned with a gap as research on the role of the principal as a "boundary administrator" has been sparse, despite, as Schwarz (1981:50) points out, an abundance, in the professional periodicals, of statements stressing the importance of public relations. "The interaction between principals and others in the school system outside their schools, as well as their relationships with the non-educational community, are topics largely neglected in the research literature on the role." And yet, the permeability of the boundary between school and environment is such that outsiders have significant effects on what occurs in the school.

This study contributes to theory at a level close to the actuality of the principal's world, and fills out an underdeveloped field, as well as giving directions for future research. It adds to knowledge through findings from a context much distant from that of the sparse related research. Through use of different methodologies this study supplements and extends existing research findings. Only through better description, grounded in actuality, will better theory emerge to guide action.

Practically, a better understanding of the actual work world of the principal should contribute to better school administration -- decisions will be more soundly based and policy will be developed that is grounded in the real situation. At present, there is still something of the illusion that Mintzberg (1973:24-25) described in pointing out that if a manager was asked what he did, he talked about planning, organizing, coordinating, controlling and so on, yet observation of the manager at work does not match such descriptions. Studies of principals at work confirm this observation. A helpful theory of the principal's work needs to be based on a realistic understanding of the work context. Increasingly, the principal is coming to be recognized as a worker in a political milieu -- a better understanding of that milieu should lead to improved principal effectiveness.

The "loosely-coupled" (Weick,1976) and "institutionalized" (Meyer and Rowan,1978) nature of education systems gives principals considerable potential for autonomy, which they exploit to varying degrees (Brieschke,1985). Direct control of principals is "zoned" (Bidwell,1965) so that there is simultaneously loose/tight control according to the activity. Indications are that the zones of tight control will decline as the move to decentralize continues (one of Naisbitt's [1982] megatrends). Ornstein (1980:257) found continuing decentralization to be the case in the United States when he updated his 1973 study. Heading the eight major reasons were enhancement of school/community relations and greater community input at the local school level.

Development of autonomy at the school level poses an important problem for education systems. While allowing autonomy they must ensure system goals are not displaced. There need to be mechanisms to ensure principals are working towards the expected results and using acceptable methods. Superordinates of principals are themselves accountable and can possibly achieve control by making principals accountable to parents. Further insight as to how such a mechanism works is of practical value.

Grassie (1979a:1) describes his unique study of the influence attributed by principals to various constituents in their environment as "a very limited expedition into territory which is only vaguely known." In practical justification of his study, he makes a point very pertinent to this study.

> If more were known about the influence schools are prepared to attribute to the community over policy areas now, about the influence they might be prepared to attribute if circumstances were more propitious . . . then strategies could be devised to try to ensure that the barriers do come down without either side feeling it has scored a victory over, or lost out to, the other.

Stringham argued (1974:58) in a similar way that policy development cannot proceed if "the underlying or implicit policies guiding current actions were not first made explicit." There is also Levin's (1982) call for more research on public involvement in education to replace ill-founded controversy. Evidence of the role parents already play in school governance is a most practical starting point.

While this study promises much by way of practical and theoretical benefit, in order for the results to be properly understood, the restrictions imposed by its design need explication.

ASSUMPTIONS

This study was based on the following assumptions.

1. The information obtained from the field survey and interviews is accurate and covers the major areas of concern.

2. The respondents answered honestly and objectively and their perceptions do provide a useful and reasonably valid picture of principal/parents/superordinate interaction.

3. The questionnaire and semi-structured interview are an adequate means of gathering data relative to the problems being investigated, and that, generally, respondents interpreted the questions uniformly and in the sense intended by the researcher.

4. The techniques used to analyze the data accurately reflect the responses obtained -- that they produce a true picture from the data .

5. The data were unaffected by the researcher's own perceptions.

DELIMITATIONS

The study is delimited by a number of factors.

1. The data was collected from one school district and from elementary schools only.

2. Those dimensions identified by the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview were the primary focus of interest, but responses to open-ended questionnaire and interview questions allowed for introduction of other dimensions.

3. Respondents were volunteers from amongst trustees, senior administrators, and elementary school principals and teachers.

4. Other possible sources of relevant data were not included and, in particular, responses were not sought from parents.

5. The study did not compare different school systems or different levels of schooling within the one system, but some comparisons may be made from the the aggregate data for each of the four major respondent groups.

6. The study dealt only with the work behavior of principals and not with their personal or social behavior in other contexts.

7. As the study was exploratory, descriptive and concerned with forming a picture of "what is", causal inferences are limited by its non-experimental nature and the weaknesses of the data.

8. As the study examined only one of the many mechanisms that control principal behavior, interaction effects amongst the mechanisms can rarely be identified.

9. The focus of interest was the tripartite relationships amongst principals, parents and superordinates, but not all aspects of these relationships were investigated.

LIMITATIONS

The assumptions and delimitations constitute limitations on the findings of the study. The major limitations are the following.

1. Perceptual data indirectly measure the variables; they are the interpretation placed by individuals on their own experience; and people cannot report what they do not know and may only report what they consider salient (Ary et al.,1985:340).

2. Instruments used in data collection were restricted in their preparation by the limitations of available research and theory in the area of study and the data must be qualified by their reliability and validity.

3. There can be no certainty that all relevant situations were included in the questions and responses, and the extent to which the variables were measured is uncertain.

4. The rate of return was a limitation and there can be no guarantee that

systematic biasing factors were detected, especially as the study involved a single organization that has a culture of its own.

5. Only some categories of potential information sources were tapped.

6. The methods used to analyze the data are a limitation.

7. While a number of means were adopted to overcome potential deficiencies in the data, Drachler's (1977:189) comment is pertinent.

> A scholar using a questionnaire to study community participation, without being enmeshed in the stormy sessions that often occur or in the issues raised, may resemble a groom kissing his bride through a veil -- he misses much.

8. As the study was not longitudinal and dealt with the respondents' perceptions of the situation at a particular time, the data may not be representative of the data that might be obtained at other times.

9. As the data were gathered from one school system in particular circumstances and deals with parental influence in part of that school system, only to the extent that other parts of the system and other school districts are similar in circumstances and personnel can conjecture and cautious generalization be made.

DEFINITION AND EXPLICATION OF TERMS

For the purposes of this study the following definitions are provided. Terms are generally used in the sense that they are understood in the school system being studied. However, some key terms are elaborated to aid understanding.

Control, according to Muth (1984:27-28)," is parsimonious and incorporates the common understanding of a completed act of power." For Hannaway and Sproul (1979) control is the "process by which an individual (or group of individuals) determines or influences what another individual (or group of individuals) actually does." Control may be direct or indirect. That is, parents as a group may control the behavior of principals, or the school system may control principal behavior by ensuring the principal is responsive to parents.

Influence was the term used in collecting data, for reasons of rapport with, and acceptability and familiarity to, the respondents. It refers to the capacity of an individual or individuals as a group to affect the behavior of another or others. As Hoyle (1982:90) views influence, no legal sanctions are involved, it is embedded in the actual relations between people or groups, and rather than being "fixed", it "is variable and operates through bargaining, manipulation, exchange and so forth." It has less of a sense of final determination and better suits a situation where many factors determine a final decision or constitute a frame of reference for decision making.

"Control" may be preferred in theoretical discussion because it relates the study to a recognized field of inquiry. Control should not be confused with the pejorative term "manipulation," which implies a concealed purpose.

Constraint is used instead of "control" at times in the literature and is used as a synonym in this study. It does not imply passivity, but rather actively channeling discretionary behavior.

Organizational participants are those people generally recognized as being part of the formal organization of the school system. The study involved data gathered from some of them: trustees, senior administrators, principals and teachers.

Senior administrators are superintendents, assistant superintendents or directors who were members of the executive council of the district. When the principal's direct line superordinate is referred to, the term supervisor is used. The terms superordinates and superiors are used for officers ranked above the principal and, at times, include trustees.

Parents are those whose children attend the school. The original intention was to focus on 'community' control or influence because it was broader and included parents and because of its predominance in the literature and professional usage.

However, at least two studies (Morris et al.,1981 and Grassie,1979) have found principals distinguish between parents and others in the environment, and so parent community is preferred. Litwak and Meyer (1974:1) reported from their study that the core of the school's local community was the families of the children attending the school and their immediate neighbors. Community may be used at times in the study because of its familiarity for respondents, but is seen as mainly consisting of parents.

Environmental control. Controls or influences operating from outside the recognized boundaries of the school are called environmental controls. They are potentially unlimited in number, as Lam (1985:367) has pointed out. Parents are only one environmental control.

School system refers to the school district selected for the study.

ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

This initial chapter identified the purpose of the study as determining whether the influence that parents exert on elementary school principal work behavior is a significant control and whether it constitutes an environmental control mechanism facilitated by the school system. The perspective outlined was that the school district may use indirect controls in the administration of schools. The significance of the problem was established for both the practitioner and the student of schools administration. Investigation of the mechanism involves four questions concerning (a) the existence and nature of parental influence on principals, (b) the ways in which principals respond and in turn influence the school, (c) superordinates' involvement, and (d) the means by which parents influence principals. The chapter has also indicated how some terms will be used and the reasons for exercising caution in interpretation and use of the findings.

The remainder of the thesis is organized into nine chapters. Chapter 2 presents a review of related literature and the rationale for the study. Chapter 3 describes the research design, and, in Chapter 4, the collection of the data and information about respondents are reported. Chapter 5 outlines how the analysis of the data was conducted, gives an overview of the results, and presents frameworks for detailed analysis in the following four chapters. Chapters six through nine analyze the data from the perspective of each of the major questions derived from the research problem and contain propositions drawn from the data. The final chapter summarizes the study, draws conclusions, and develops some recommendations for the management of schools and school systems and for the conduct of future research. The bibliography lists the works consulted and the appendices list the documentation analyzed, give overall tables of results for Part I of the questionnaire, and provide copies of the instruments and correspondence involved in the data collection.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

This chapter briefly reviews the literature and related research, selectively, in order to (a) provide a background for the study, (b) justify the selection of the research problem, (c) highlight existing research and theory which seem pertinent, (d) identify inadequacies in the existing knowledge base, and, (e) develop some conceptual bases for the study.

Chapter 1 introduced the problem of whether the relationships among the principal, the school system and the parent community constitute a control mechanism. This chapter deals with the inadequacies of previous research on this problem, particularly with regard to the principal, the central actor in the triad. Attention is drawn to the proposition that practice may be the forerunner of both theory and policy. The results of two seminal studies and some supporting research suggest the role of parents may have developed in this way.

Attempts to explain organizational characteristics of schools and school systems provide useful lenses through which to interpret findings and understand the context in which the parental control mechanism operates. Seven that seem pertinent to the problem are described before reviewing the relevant literature on the principalship, school systems, and parents.

From the literature review a number of concepts were extracted which served as a base for guiding the development of the study. The interpretative frameworks for structuring the analysis of the data, developed in chapter 5, grew out of both the conceptual bases and the data itself.

LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

There are inadequacies in knowledge and research on how schools and school systems work, and of their relations with constituents. Allison (1983:13) is scathing about the neglect of studying schools themselves, and Bridges (1982:25), after reviewing 322 studies, three quarters of which dealt with principals, concluded that, "There is no compelling evidence to suggest that a major theoretical issue or practical problem relating to school administrators has been resolved by those toiling in the intellectual vineyards since 1967." Others point out, as Lortie did (1975:vii), that "schooling is long on prescription, short on description", or, as March wrote (1978:244), "Books and formal training programs have somewhat the same relationship to administration that they have to parenthood."

Growing recognition of the importance of studying the school with consequent attempts to research and document the actual character of school administration "begins to illuminate the critically important school-site level of administration" (Boyd and Crowson, 1981:336). At the school-site the principal is the chief actor, but Greenfield, after reviewing the research and detailing its difficulties, concluded (1982:34): "Research and development of theory about the principal are at an infant stage." And yet, as Morris et al. (1982: 689) maintain, "In view of its importance, the principalship should be the most thoroughly researched and best understood administrative position in education."

Thirty years ago, Dill (1958:409) drew attention to the need for "propositions about the ways in which environmental factors constrain the structures of organizations and the behavior of organizational participants." The need has not been met as Moore (1975:35) comments that, "Virtually no studies exist in the research literature to conceptualize the principal's role in terms of 'boundary-spanning' between the school organization and the school community." Morris et al. (1981:26) and Tyler (1983:462) expressed concern about the lack of knowledge of the interactive effects amongst parents, school and school system. And even more recently, Murphy (1986:127) wrote in much the same vein:

> More thorough analysis of the variety of linkage mechanisms that shape principal behavior . . . is clearly needed. And all these will need to be filtered through a variety of perspectives, for example, in schools of varying socio-economic compositions, degrees of effectiveness, grade levels, and so forth.

The problem area is clearly not well researched but of great importance. There is little empirical data on parent-principal-superordinate relationships and assumptions may well be out-of-date as change may have occurred without being recognized.

UNRECOGNIZED POLICY CHANGE

Organizational policies do change and quite often it is through many small decisions made over a long period of time, through "partisan incrementalism" (Lindblom,1968). Boyd (1978:583) claims incremental decision making "is dominant" in education. Change can occur without any explicit intention. March (1981:564) has been an exponent of this view. For him, organizations are constantly changing, not through arbitrary direction, but rather through " an ecology of concurrent responses in various parts of an organization to various interconnected parts of the environment" (p.570). Change occurs because ordinary people go about their conventional, routine activities in an intelligent, competent way. People have beliefs about the environment and their actions in their job reflect those beliefs so that, "Actions taken as a result of beliefs about the environment do, in fact, construct the environment." Moreover, policy can be developed in practice before it is recognized as such: "The discovery of new intentions is a common consequence of intentional behavior."

Elsewhere, March (1978:242) emphasized the normative basis of educational administration because "education is a system of beliefs shared widely in society," and that administration of education "is embedded in the structure of social beliefs about education" (p.244). The two ideas of incremental change and integration with social beliefs suggest the possibility that school-parents-system relations may be inadequately described.

Support for the notion of unrecognized change comes from Lipsky's theory of street-level bureaucracy (1980) which maintains that policy is made at the interface with clients, by those who deliver the service. Research on the implementation of innovations in schools has reached similar conclusions (Berman and McLaughlin,1976). To some extent policy is only discovered in examining practice. Stringham (1974:17) found this in his study of the development of the 1970 School Act in Alberta, where he points out that one type of policy is "made as experience accumulates and . . . is only discovered retrospectively; that which has arisen through tacit acceptance of practice and is implicit, latent and unwritten." He concluded, similarly to the justification for this study, that before new policy can be made, underlying or implicit policies guiding current actions need to be made explicit (p.58).

Moore (1975) studied the role changes experienced by principals in Los Angeles as a result of establishment of advisory councils for schools. Principals' behavior had altered, but, as societal patterns had changed to encourage parents to be more aggressive about their concerns, "Decentralization schemes involving structured community involvement mechanisms for the principal may only be formal recognition and reinforcement of role changes already experienced by principals"(p.236). A similar point was made by Mann (1976:143) in writing of the "formalization and extension of what is already an unsystematic reality for most urban principals."

Not only have the relationships amongst parents, principals and superordinates not been fully described, but it is also possible that the implicit policies that govern the relationships bear little resemblance to explicit policies -- that change has occurred which is yet to be generally recognized. Parental influence may have increased considerably and it may serve a system purpose, as two seminal studies suggest.

SEMINAL STUDIES

Two pertinent studies were found in the literature. One deals with the various mechanisms through which superordinates control principal behavior. The other mapped environmental influences on principals and demonstrated that principals perceived the major influences on their behavior as being superordinates and parents.

Peterson's Research on Control of Principal Behavior

Peterson's report (1983) gives the first comprehensive and in-depth study of "the complex process of control" in school systems, arising from the circumstances of the principal's position, "as the linkage between central office and classrooms as well as between parents and teachers." To keep the school working toward organizational goals and objectives, principals "must be neither so tightly constrained that they cannot respond to changing conditions, nor so loosely controlled that they seek personal rather than organizational goals" (1984:573).

The nature of control varied with the principal's activity. There was direct hierarchical and close control over administrative matters but unobtrusive, indirect control over aspects of the core technology, such as supervision of classroom instruction and placement of students, which are not amenable to prescription. Crowson and Morris (1984:594) found a similar "subtle balancing of control and autonomy."

Peterson reasoned that the control systems he found were necessary because: (a) it is impossible to prescribe or closely supervise principals' work as knowledge of the core technology of successful principaling is limited, and their work is characterized by variety, brevity, lack of logical sequence, interruptions and complexity; (b) goals are numerous, ambiguous, unclear, difficult to measure and produced cooperatively so that flexibility is essential in order to cope with the variable demands of local constituencies; (c) the environment impinges in many ways, and (d) district size, school dispersion and the nature of schools as relatively self-contained bounded sub-units make control difficult.

Six mechanisms of control were identified and constituted "a broad based and pervasive influence over the work of the principal . . . . giving them a sense of considerable autonomy while maintaining subtle but perhaps substantial control" (1983:221). Controls were, at times, interdependent, as when the operation of a mechanism is enhanced by selection for the principalship of those disposed to accept it.

Four of these mechanisms were hierarchical and involved line authority in the bureaucracy. The first was supervision which was little used. Input control was used extensively as principals do have to spend much time and effort in securing and justifying inputs from the system. Behavior control took the form of written instructions, rules and regulations and requirements such as attendance at meetings. Output control involved the expectation and measuring of results.

The fifth mechanism was selection/socialization. It involved choosing as principals those who would behave appropriately and socializing them on the job with the same objective. This leads to internalized control. It is illustrated in Wolcott's (1973) study where he found the "prerequisites for selection" for the principalship (p.325), and the "traditions that have grown up around" (p.318) the principalship are powerful forces molding principal behavior.

Environmental control was the sixth mechanism. The central office took advantage of "the powerful and pervasive influence of the local community . . . . by defining 'gaining community support ' as one of the products of the work of principals" (1984:576).

Peterson noted that, "In the principals' view the community was an extraorganizational monitor of their behavior, a complex and, at times, unpredictable provider of information" (1984:592). The greater the involvement of parents in the school, the more the opportunities for monitoring. When superintendents responded quickly to parental complaints, principals read the signs. Half the principals believed superintendents placed importance on public reaction to principals' work and that it was significant in their evaluation. Duke (1985:98) supports these findings and claims that conclusions of others that there is little supervision of principals' work may derive from a failure to recognize the importance of "supervisory visits by non-hierarchical influentials." When the principals were asked where they looked for feedback in order to gauge their own performance, only students and teachers were mentioned more than the community as a source.

Peterson did not elaborate much on the environmental control mechanism -- the expectation that the principal will have the support of the community. The present study explores this particular mechanism further.

Grassie's Study of Attributed Influence

Grassie (1979a,1979b) endeavored to map the relations between schools and their environments by ascertaining the influence over different operational areas and policies which principals attributed to various categories of people in the environment. Principals were chosen because "they are the link between department and staff, between parents and staff and between the community generally and staff" (1979a:9).

Principals were asked to rate the strength of their own feelings of compulsion to act on receiving critical or evaluative comment from fourteen environmental constituents in reference to twelve school policy areas. In addition they rated the 'salience' of the policy areas, by indicating their dislike of criticism in that area of the school.

A major finding was that principals did not feel compelled to take action on receipt of evaluative comment from any source -- they always reserved some area of discretion to themselves.

Principals felt moderately compelled to make a suggested change and, more often than not, would make it for only three of the constituents. "Principals appear to view their school environment in terms of general influence as consisting of those with formal authority over them and those in an immediate and direct client relationship with them" (1979a:39). Principals' ranking of influence was formal authority (education department), expertise (inspectors) and right to know (parents) (1979b:4). Parents ranked third, very much ahead of all other environmental constituents in influence. This is consonant with the finding of Morris et al. (1984:116) that parents are the primary clients for principals.

The principals indicated they were highly selective about where and how they learn what the community needs and demands -- mainly from parents and teachers and through direct verbal communication. Influence was not general, but related to specific policy areas. Only for the education department were they more likely to act in all policy areas. Parental influence over the core activities of teaching techniques, methods of assessment and staff deployment was only to the extent of 'not ignoring comments'.

Grassie's general conclusion that "It could reasonably be argued that schools are not the closed communities they are often accused of being" (1979b:4) is one of the central assumptions of study reported here. His finding that superordinates and parents have most influence on principal behavior is also germane to this study.

THEORIES ABOUT SCHOOLS AS ORGANIZATIONS

This section describes, briefly, a number of theories which have been used to describe the organization of schools and school systems. Morris et al. (1981:12) claim that the 1930's and 1940's were the epoch of managerial task definition in the study of school administration, the 1950's and 1960's were concerned with open systems and client publics or constituencies, while the 1970's and 1980's have been ethnographically oriented, examining what the administrator actually does and deciding from that just what the responsibilities and constituencies actually are. The inclusion of a number of theories spanning the last two epochs reflects the view that none is adequate to fully explain the nature of schools and their systems. As Willower writes (1980:2), "All theories are provisional and partial... they tend to be imperfectly articulated, imperfectly operationalized, and imperfectly tested." What scholarly investigaions have done, however, is make it "painfully obvious that school governance is both complex in operation and uncertain in outcomes" (Mitchell,1982:734).

Loose Coupling

Discussion of loose coupling is warranted because of its popularity and because the notion of coupling is in many ways synonymous with control. Parental influence as a control used by the school system is a coupling mechanism.

Weick (1976) popularized the notion in educational administration. He argued that organizations are tightly coupled where there is (a) a self-correcting rational system binding highly interdependent people, (b) consensus on goals and the means to their attainment, (c) dissemination of information as a sufficient basis for coordination, and (d) predictable problems calling for prescribed responses. They are loosely coupled where these requirements are not met, such as in the core technical areas and in dealing with the unpredictable parental environment.

Although, as Firestone points out (1984), loose coupling has proved a difficult concept to research, it has gained some empirical support from studies by Meyer et al. (1978), Rowan (1982), Martin and Willower (1981), Hannaway and Sproull (1979), and Hanson (1981). There are also some contradictory findings. For example, Kmetz and Willower (1982:75) report a study in which principals "kept in reasonably close touch with their superiors," but other studies have shown comparatively little superintendent-principal contact (Friesen and Duignan,1980; Bossert et al.,1982; Peterson,1984).

Loose coupling, while valuable in emphasizing the complexity of educational organizations and the limits of our knowledge about them (Renihan,1985:129), has increasingly been criticized. Firestone says (1984:3) the concept is "counter intuitive" and serves as an escape from accountability, leadership and rationality. Boyd (1982b:111) wonders, ironically, "if schools, with all their loose coupling and irrationality can be called organizations at all." Charters (1981:308) claims no serious analyst would argue for an uncoupled system: "that occurrences in the classroom are unrelated to occurrences in neighboring classrooms, directives, decisions, or leadership from the administrative hierarchy, or broader policies, practices and pressures from the school board, the community, and beyond." Similarly, Miles (1981) writes that teachers' classroom behavior is "narrowly prescribed and highly institutionalized," and Willower (1986:31) asserts that teachers and other school personnel are well aware of the rules of the game.

Both Willower (1982) and Firestone (1984) are concerned that loose coupling has too many meanings with the former identifying some fifteen different connotations for the concept (p.95). Weick seems to have come to accept this (1985:121): "The image of a loosely coupled system is important more as a summary description of a way to think about organizations than as a precise technical description of a specific quality of organizational structure." Schools, he maintains (1982:675), are tightly coupled to their community as something is done quickly when parents raise their voice, but because this something lacks substance they are less than tightly coupled. The chief function Weick sees for the principal is in cementing the tight coupling that exists in the form of key values, while allowing the loose coupling that preserves novel solutions, facilitates local accommodations and provides for professional autonomy.

Willower (1982) takes Weick to task for arguing that on the one hand the constraints, low discretion, and socialization that produce uniformity represent loose coupling, while on the other hand formal authority and rules constitute tight coupling. He suggests it might be better to think in terms of formal and informal mechanisms of control which are functionally equivalent. This is similar to Talbert's argument (1980:5) that a context of loosely coupled authority relations allows a principal to develop informal bases of power. Firestone's conclusion from his doubts about loose coupling (1984:10), stresses a contingency approach, in that effective coordination requires a matching of appropriate control mechanisms with the situation.

Firestone also draws attention to the need to look at the pattern of coupling rather than specific links as the pattern may vary for different levels of schooling. That various mechanisms combine to form a whole different from the individual couplings seems to be confirmed by Ouchi's findings (1978 : 284) in retail stores of a "symbiotic relationship" in which output control was the "legitimating ritual that justifies and protects the other (behavior control), which produces the real control."

Simple categorizations of loose and tight are inadequate when associated with particular controls. Any control may be tight or loose as it affects behavior. It is the effects of the coupling in use that are important. Moreover, no control can be assessed in isolation but must be related to its situation and to the impact of the whole control system operative at any time. Thus, Meyer, Scott and Deal (1981) write of the need for loose coupling because of the diversity of environment constituencies (students, parents, community sectors and state concerns). However, this does not mean the individual constituency lacks power over the school, nor that the interacting pattern of controls generated does not tightly constrain the school. Parental influence on principals may be strong or weak and this is not adequately conveyed by the terms tight and loose.

Schools and Their Systems as Societal Institutions

As Wirt and Kirst (1982:34) maintain, "The belief that schools are embedded in society and responsive to its demands is a truism, perhaps the oldest in the study of education." However, it has been given new significance by Meyer and Rowan (1977,1978) who build on the loose coupling notion that in school organizations structure is disconnected from the technical (work) activity, and activity is disconnected from its effects. Schools are uncoupled because close supervision would uncover inconsistencies and inefficiencies and because societal consensus requires that necessary adaptations to local circumstances, which cause local variations in control and effectiveness, be kept invisible.

Research led Meyer and others to the conclusion that "the process that holds educational organizations together and gives them meaning and value is . . . their structural conformity to prevailing institutional rules," (Meyer et al.,1978: 258). Societal consensus legitimates the school. Schools are a socially constructed reality and, "A school, to survive, must conform to institutional rules -- including community understandings -- that define teacher categories and credentials, pupil selection and definition, proper topics of instruction, and appropriate facilities" (Meyer et al.,1981:152).

Schools are highly responsive to the demands of the local environment because they need to retain high levels of legitimacy and support. They need to maintain a high level of satisfaction in their constituencies and so are most attentive to their reputations. Mann (1976:55) also pointed out how principals use public relations to emphasize responsiveness but only in order to retain control themselves. As Scott writes (1983:14), the "idea" developed in the 1970's "that managing the actual work of the organization might be less critical than managing the way in which the work was depicted to the environment."

The societal institution theory helps explain the apparent paradox of principal autonomy within what appears to be a very structured and tightly controlled system. The sameness of schools comes from the "normative system that exists outside any particular educational organization . . . (but) permeates each school and district" (Meyer et al., 1981:160). Low levels of parental involvement and the conservative nature of parental influence on principals are also the result of schools' being legitimated by general norms.

And because survival depends only on conforming to generalized societal criteria, principals place emphasis on demonstrating they have the support of parents and give attention to their complaints. Mann's comment (1976:58) on the "drive of educators to maintain the facade of unanimity by denying the presence of non-supporters" confirms the phenomenon.

Willower acknowledges that "everyone agrees that schools reflect their societal and community environments." However, while agreeing that "schools maintain internal leeway by maintaining legitimacy in the eyes of the community through symbolic and behavioral affirmation of dominant social values," he feels the argument is carried too far. He doubts whether the societal consensus is as great as Meyer and Rowan believe and points to the fact that the ritual categories do change in response to circumstances, so that legitimation can be precarious. Miles (1982:43) is also quite critical of Meyer and Rowan's approach as "stipulative/speculative."

Thresholds, Vulnerability and the Zone of Tolerance

Thresholds. A number of theorists have conceptualized the schools-community relationship in ways similar to the societal institutions theory but have seen the need for additional concepts, for a full description. For example, Willower (1982) thought that schools, as public organizations, were politically vulnerable because their public character legitimates citizen intervention,- - most citizens have personal experience of schools, the profession has no convincing jargon, boards are elected, and society is always vigilant for its young. He considers teachers have a good sense of the thresholds for acceptable behavior and that principals give considerable attention to scanning internally and externally in order to pre-empt threshold violations.

Stetter and Willower (1985) report results from a study of cases of serious teacher misconduct which support these views. Principals acted as threshold guardians, maintaining the legitimacy of the school, through developing a sense of the limits of acceptable teacher behavior based on their perceptions of community expectations. Principals believed that if they did not correct a situation then their schools would be negatively affected in the community, and that they had to meet district expectations to handle the matters "in house". Parents are monitors of legitimacy because in the thirty seven cases of teacher misconduct studied, principals first became aware of thirteen through parents, and of another eight through students. However, the paucity of cases indicated teachers know the rules -- they protect their autonomy by accepting the limits. A key finding was the amount of principal activity to protect the school's legitimacy and its bounded leeway.

The concept of threshold monitoring at district level is supported by Hanson's (1967-77) report of his field study of three schools, and observation that the "district has an invisible alarm system built in that constantly monitors its sensitive relationships with the community."

Vulnerability. Although Miles (1980:62) has some concern about the concept of school vulnerability because of its "woolly" nature, most, like Willower, accept it. As long ago as 1956 in their study of a Canadian suburb, Seeley et al. noted how vulnerable teachers were and Bidwell (1965) and Lortie (1975) similarly stressed teachers' vulnerability to parents. Mann wrote (1976:6) about how the principal of the neighborhood school is subject to more questioning than other public officials, "and because the school is physically 'around the corner' and conversationally as accessible as the children over the dinner table, people expect to monitor, criticize, and affect the school in a direct personal fashion."

Some have found evidence of vulnerability in the way administrators react to parents. For example, Summerfield's (1971) four principals gave whatever time was necessary to parental queries and complaints and the central office returned every call and answered every letter from parents. Similarly, feelings of vulnerability were reflected in Summerfield's conclusion that the principal's chief political function was to minimize neighborhood-school conflict. Gold and Miles' (1981) account of the demise of an innovative school describes its domestication because the public "owns" it, and its "thin skin" which allows easy entry by clients and patrons. As Miles relates (1980:83), principals are eager to avoid conflict because of the effects it can have on their career advancement. Mann (1976:108) makes a similar point: "Good administrators are supposed to keep people happy and contented . . . (with) support (that) appears to be widespread." There is a powerful imperative to avoid conflict. Brooks (1984:119), in his analysis of the Alberta principalship, says: "Parents and other members of the community relate very closely to the schools that serve them, and are quick to become involved in any actions that threaten their smooth operation."

Zone of Tolerance. Boyd has written extensively on the vulnerability of schools and the effects on the behavior of administrators, though he claims they are neither "prisoners" of the community nor autonomous professionals (1976:563). He suggests there is a "mobilization of bias" in the school community which is composed of pervasive values and beliefs delimiting what can and cannot be done by the school (1978:595). In effect, a "zone of tolerance" exists whose boundaries or thresholds mark schools' vulnerability and incline them to avoid conflict, particularly as the boundaries may not be clearly defined. Professional leadership can be exercized within the zone but administrators are not inclined to test its limits because of (a) their sense of vulnerability, (b) the paucity of incentives for risk-taking, (c) their professional ideology, and (d) selection and socialization procedures. Rather, they are more inclined to anticipate community reactions in order to avoid conflict and so "citizens get what they desire in public schools . . . because local educators anticipate, or happen to agree with their desires" (1982a,1125).

Boyd drew upon Iannoccone and Lutz's study (1976:550) to illustrate how communities reassert control of educational policy by displacing incumbent trustees (who in turn displaced superintendents) who have failed to respond adequately.

Various other studies illustrate the zone of tolerance exists. Dwyer et al. (reported in Good and Brophy,1986:592) found their five principals viewed the community as a constraining influence. O'shea (1975) drew upon five case studies of suburban schools in the literature to conclude that over time parental preferences had to be respected. Summerfield commented (1971:81) that, "An outbreak of parental concern serves notice that the limits of tolerance have been reached." In Gold and Miles' case study (1981:353), the community eventually exercised enough power to change the school rapidly and fundamentally. Leider (1983), in his survey study, has shown how community dissatisfaction can disrupt core school activities. Fullan, in writing about change, (1985:195) draws attention to impolite observers' reference to parental opposition as the 'crap detector' capacity of those on the receiving end.

Similarly to Boyd, Wirt maintains (1976:82): "Professional educators' ideas tend to be accepted as long as they do not severely contradict constituents' ideas of responsiveness, cost and service." And with Kirst (1982:119) he emphasizes that lack of participation by parents does not reduce vulnerability because: "The power of one parent with a complaint raised against a perceived injustice is enough to agitate administrators and can, if not met, escalate into a flash flood from the community."

The zone of tolerance is similar to the zone of satisfaction ("that area of latitude granted by a parent to the school principal or staff in operation and administration of the school") whose maintenance Grainger (1984:282) found was such a complex and demanding task for the principal.

The ideas discussed in this section have relevance for the study. The vulnerability of schools explains the sensitivity of principals to parental influence, their desire to avoid conflict, and the emphasis they put on parental support. The notions of thresholds and boundaries point to the possible value in studying transgressions of these and the role that parents play when this happens. The zone of tolerance concept aids in understanding both the limited autonomy of principals and their potential for leadership, as well as their behavior in monitoring boundaries. Boyd's explanation of why principals do not exploit all their possible discretion, and how they constrain their behavior by anticipating reactions, are alternative descriptions of similar phenomena which imply considerable parental influence. There is also the possibility that different principals, depending on their abilities and dispositions, might widen or narrow the zone.

Street-level Bureaucracy

While the previous section stressed constraints on behavior of educational administrators, this section is concerned with the power of "lower participants in complex organizations" as Mechanic termed the phenomenon (1962). Lipsky's theory of street-level (1980) bureaucracy emphasizes the discretion and power of those delivering the service (teachers, principals) to ultimately determine the policies they carry out. He argues "that the decisions of street level bureaucrats, the routines they establish and devices they invent to cope with uncertainties and work pressures effectively become the policies they carry out," (1980:ii).

Those who deal with the clients must have discretionary power to meet client 'needs' when resources are insufficient and organizational rules are ambiguous or unwieldy. Weatherby and Lipsky (1977), in their report on the implementation of a state special education act, found operatives, in effect, made policy. The similarities between the behavior of the operatives in their study and the observed work behavior of principals, have been detailed by Brieschke (1985:162).

Lipsky attributes part of the power of the street-level bureaucrats to the control they have gained over their work environments through their unions (p.7) and to the public's demand for responsiveness to the individual's situation (p.33). While street-level bureaucrats, for Lipsky, largely control their work for their own benefit, he does concede (p.47) that the lip-service they pay to client views and internal and professional pressures give clients some influence, as does the need to maintain the myths of altruism and responsiveness (p.76). However, they tend to resist clients' organizing, regarding such attempts as unnecessary, frivolous, irresponsible and unrepresentative (p.119).

For this study important elements of the theory are (a) policy growing out of its implementation, (b) the arguments that principals have very considerable potential discretion, (c) the difficulty of control, and (d) the need for control if self-serving ends are not to be substituted for organizational objectives. The attention drawn to the principal's ability to manipulate the demand for responsiveness is significant, as are the reasons for responsiveness to clients. None the less, Lipsky probably overstates the case since previous sections have drawn attention to the constraints on principals. Hasenfeld confirms that there may be more control with his comment (1983:203) that most clients of human service organizations are satisfied because "powerful internal and external social control mechanisms limit the exercise of power by human service practitioners."

Environments and Boundary Management

Attention to the environment as determining what happens in organizations derives largely from the open systems perspective and the work of Thompson (1967) who saw one of management's two tasks as handling the interdependence of the organization with its surroundings.

Unfortunately, "There is little real consensus as to how the environment's relationship with the organization should be conceptualized or measured" (Bacharach,1981:26). The more attention has focussed on environments, the more difficult the concept has become to define, although recognition of the importance of organizational-environment relationship is generally accepted.

Part of the problem of coming to terms with environments is their phenomenological nature, as Schwartz describes (1981:46): "The organizational environment as perceived by the maker of an organizational decision consists only of whatever or whoever that individual considers relevant to that particular decision." Getzels (1980:367) makes a similar observation: "At one point the predominant influence may come from the local community, at another from the administrative community . . . and so on. The school administrator does not deal with the school and the community; he inevitably deals with the school and communities -- indeed with communities in communities."

The parent community is the most important influence on the principal from outside the educational community. It is, however, only one component of the environment. The educational community's components which most influence the principal are the school's teachers and district superordinates. The latter may be viewed as part of the school's environment although the school is a sub-unit of the district organization and at times the parent community is regarded as a part of the environment for the district, not just the school.

The school-district relationship has been described in terms of "nested layers in which each organizational level sets the context and defines the boundaries for the layer below" (Purkey and Smith,1982). The nested layers notion can be extended to encompass the provincial or national, and the societal or cultural environments. For example, Pitner and Ogawa (1981) found superintendents functioned as the agents of society in ensuring schools reflect societal preferences.

The concept of nested layers of environments emphasizes that the tripartite relationship of school, school system and parent community is artificially isolated for study. Allison (1983:23), Boyd and Crowson (1981:358), Harman (1985:296), and Wirt (1977:186) have all drawn attention to the dangers of choosing lower level units for analysis when higher levels of educational and government organization have final authority and determine the most important matters. From another perspective there is difficulty in, for example, concentrating on the principal's role in dealing with an environment for the school which includes the district and province, when the principal also has responsibilities for dealing with the environment on behalf of the district and province. However, any study must simplify in order to come to grips with behavior as people and their situations are too complex for any model to fully encompass.

The notions of "domain" and "domain consensus" describe the area the organization claims as its own and the general agreement that allows it to do so. The domain has boundaries which mark the distinction between the organization and environment. Boundaries can be thought of as closed or open. But even here, the reality is only in perception because, as Miles (1981;43) points out in regard to schools: "From the inside, the skin of the organization seems unbearably thin, overpermeable to dissatisfied stakeholders; from the outside the barriers to citizen influence seem tough and elastic."

A closed boundary allows of little influence, while an open and permeable boundary which parents can cross provides opportunity for greater influence. Miles (1981) identifies environmental dependence or autonomy, and environment contact or withdrawal, as two of the dilemmas facing those who administer schools. The weight of recent opinion seems to favour a view that schools cannot be closed off from environmental influences. As long ago as 1965, Bidwell (p.78) noted that the parent clientele may 'open' the school and classroom, and that any school was vulnerable because of the student audience. Greenfield (1982:32) considers the school boundary highly permeable with little "known of the consequences of this permeability for the school principal." Morris et al. (1982:26) note the lack of research on the important topic of the school administrator vis-a-vis the surrounding neighborhood because, "It would seem that the days of safe encapsulation behind a 'four-walls-of the-school' philosophy are at an end . . . the school is necessarily involved fully with its surrounding environment.' Meyer et al. (1981:155) see schools as highly penetrated organizations. Schwartz (1982:3) found that the increase in advisory groups associated with schools, an activist tendency critical of public institutions, and the rhetoric of community participation mean that the principal has to deal actively with the environment.

Possibly the question of open or closed boundaries is best resolved through a contingency perspective. That is, the degree of openess depends upon the particular situation. For example, Willower (1982) has written that results from Mintzberg type unstructured observation studies, showing that principals spend only a little time on environmental matters, explain little, since 5 or 10 percent time allocation might be enough where situations are placid, or community and superordinate expectations are accurately anticipated. Summerfield (1971:31) developed "the rule of best fit" from his findings -- the principal's political style has to match his neighborhood. Similarly, Hanson (1981:246) claims "the school requires variability in organizational response capabilities to cope with changing environmental needs and demands."

Acceptance that there are boundaries to the organization, that these boundaries can vary along various dimensions, and that they have to be managed from a contingency perspective, focuses attention on the boundary spanning role of the principal, as Hanson (1976-77:30) discovered: "In short, the principal's office serves as the hub around which the school- community relationship is monitored."

Moore (1975) studied the boundary spanning role of the principal, or the role of the principal in achieving responsiveness of the school to its client groups, and found it was perceived by the eighteen principals as their most notable role change. Schwartz's study (1981) of five principals in Canada found they spent a lot of time on boundary spanning or maintenance,which he preferred to term "boundary administration." Morris et al. (1981:27) concluded, "It is the principal who is expected to be most responsive to the organization's clientele, to be 'open' to the community, and to implement guidelines for parental advisement."

A widely used concept in relation to boundary spanning is "buffering," though its meaning is somewhat imprecise, ranging from "management" to "concealment" (Meyer et al.,1981). In effect, it seems to have come to mean protecting against unwanted interference from the environment. Thus Moore's principals used the district's regulations as a defence of their own autonomy in dealing with parents and made sure they were abreast of developments in other schools that might be known to parents. Morris et al. (1981:27) found the principal who "fails, however, to buttress the larger organization (district) sufficiently from clientele demands or who uses parental assistance too conspicuously to serve his own school program is not well appreciated by hierarchical superiors." The principal is a boundary administrator not just for the school, but for the district as well.

There seems general agreement that boundary administration requires discretion in order to manage uncertainty. Schwartz (1981:211) found that principals had to exercise discretion in order to maintain equilibrium with the district environment, to protect the school from its unpredictable clientele, and to adapt organizational policies to local needs.

This section introduced the concept of schools as organizations related to their environments. Although there are difficulties in defining environments there is no question that dealing with them is an important function for the principal and that environments can have immediate and specific influence on the school as well as establishing contexts for all activities concerning the school. Any particular decision will be the result of those influences recognized by the decision maker at the time as well as the conscious and unconscious paradigm he or she has for viewing the world. The relationship of school and environment can be described as open or closed but schools can be closed only to a degree. The environment is always impinging. The boundaries where school and environment meet have to be managed and this is a major responsibility of the principal, who has also to manage this boundary for the school system. In order to perform the function a principal must exercise considerable discretion, whether formally conferred or not.

Representation and Balance

Two researchers derived concepts from their data which highlight the equilibrium that has to be achieved by the principal.

Representation. Wirt (1976:61) has characterized the basic problem in governance of American schools as the continuing tension between the need for leadership and the desire for the leadership to express the community's will. Mann (1976) interviewed educational administrators in New York state in order to investigate whether the interests and desires of the community were represented in their decisions.

Mann identified in the administrators three representational role orientations associated with access to the school, participation in decision making and responsiveness to the community. The trustee preferred to rely on his own values derived largely from professional expertise. The delegate was concerned to express citizen preferences. The politico used either the trustee or delegate orientation in a contingency approach but with an objective in mind. Mann found that trustees predominated at 61 percent, with delegates at 30 percent, although there was some slight tendency for more of the latter in elementary schools. Horowitz (reported in Block,1983:81) followed up on Mann's study after ten years, five of which had seen implementation of decentralization, and found the delegates had grown to 47 percent while the trustees had declined to 30 percent.

Mann argued for a more representational role for administrators on the basis of democratic principle and improved schooling, particularly as he recognized their power to remake laws in implementing them (1976:5). He wanted lowered barriers to participation and increased responsiveness so that principals represented the proximate people rather than bureaucratic superiors, and derived the benefits of community involvement. However, he was cautious and seems to advocate (p.130) expanding the considerable existing discretion of the principal to reach a balance suitable for local conditions. Pinero's account (1982:169) of her success as a principal gives another perspective on the representational role as "intermediary between the board, a political body that by its nature is mostly responsive to the interests of the larger society, and the more specific interests of the community around the school." The contingency approach might well lead to advocacy of the politico role for the principal, particularly if findings about "the mission" in effective schools research are accepted.

Balance. Litwak's exploratory study surveyed children, mothers, local residents and teachers for eighteen elementary schools, and from the results he and Meyer (1974) developed a balance concept for interpreting variations in school-community relations. A basic premise is that the family group and the bureaucratic school have to coordinate their activities but if they get too close they can destroy each other. Educators were perceived to have three different orientations, similar to Mann's, in establishing relations with the home. The closed door orientation adopts formalistic attitudes as the parent community is considered extraneous, even injurious, to the work of the school because of its lack of professional attitudes and its emotional base. The open door orientation is collegial, recognizes most learning occurs outside the school, and seeks to use this as a basis for motivating school learning through intimate contact with the family. The balance orientation looks for the best midpoint between intimate association and maintaining social distance -- close enough for coordination but without impairment of professional performance.

The object of the principal, who is recognized as the key, should be to establish "a balanced distance . . . for maximum education advantage" (1974:53). The principal can do so through adopting an appropriate administrative style which takes into account various community characteristics, and through utilizing some nine linking mechanisms according to circumstances.

Goldring's (1986) findings support the balance theory as the principals she studied had more negative attitudes to parents where communities were eager to participate in the school, while they reported most engagement with parents who were most unresponsive. Hallinger and Murphy's (1986) findings that effective schools with higher socio-economic clientele were more open, while those with lower socio-economic parents were inclined to shut them out, appear to be contradictory. But here the overriding imperative was achievement, rather than the best balance of home and school for achievement of other goals. Peterson (1983) found principals from higher socio-economic areas, where parents might be expected to be more assertive, had a more autonomous style. Jancovic (1983) reports that in Edmonton the boundary between schools and community was a source of conflict and ambiguity for principals, which might indicate the difficulties of achieving balance. Similarly, White concluded (1983:31) from a survey of a district in British Columbia, that "a 'closed door' was not apparent although the 'welcome mat' was not always in place."

Bidwell (1965) wrote of the need to maintain parental commitment in order to sustain the school's authority while maintaining sufficient school-parent distance to allow organizational latitude (p.1011), and of the problem of preventing "client demands from defining client welfare, compounded by the necessity . . . to remain responsive." Similarly, Morris et al. (1981:80) point out that while parental involvement has become a major focus of the principalship, "It is well understood . . . parent involvement and outside influences are to be kept in balance. Parental involvement is almost by definition a destabilizing influence on the school." Regard for parents as the natural enemy of school staff has a long history (Roper:1977).

The main weakness of Litwak and Meyer's concept of balance, understandably, is the limits of its scope. The parent-principal relationship is much more complex. As Morris et al. (1984:80) explain, the principal is expected by the school system to maintain friendly and useful relations with parents while protecting the system itself from their pressures. But the principal also values the extra help and political power close parent relationships can give, while needing to maintain distance in order to protect school essentials such as staffing, resource allocation, pupil control and curriculum decisions from interference.

The principal has many forces to keep in balance -- not just parents. Boyd (1981:324) says bargains have to be made with employees if environmental expectations are to be met. Crow (1984) found the principal had to find a balance between his own autonomy and central office control, and between teacher autonomy and control of teachers. Hodgson (1972:64), in commenting on parent-board relations, described how the principal " must appear to be active but not too active, and certainly not too active in the wrong direction (the 'right' direction of course, depending upon the point of view)."

The balancing of many interests requires that principals define their own roles, or adopt the "best fit" style. But it also draws attention to the interactive nature of their role in a "visible high risk position" (Peterson,1985:197), at the centre of what Pineró (1982:162) describes as "a triangle shaped equally by three forces: the community surrounding the school; the staff or students within the school; and the school board."

The representation and balance concepts provide useful ways of conceptualizing the school's relationship with parents. They stress the unique solutions that are the principal's responsibility to achieve through tailoring administrative style to varied circumstances and through adopting an interactive posture which includes being susceptible to influence. But parents are not the only powerful influence and other influences have to be balanced by the principal as well.

Political Economy

The political economy or public or collective choice perspective on educational organizations and the behavior of people in them may help to explain the relations amongst principal, parents and superordinates. In fact, Boyd and Crowson (1981:351) claim it offers a succinct, rational explanation of the "confusing complex of polarities -- rational and irrational, bureaucratic and unbureaucratic, loosely structured and tightly structured, opened to change and closed to change, vulnerable and invulnerable," that constitute school organizations.

The basic assumption, as Crowson and Morris (1985:68) point out, is that individuals are rational and self-interested and, "try to maximize their own welfare (or benefits) within the context of the institutional or organizational reward structure." The main determinant of how people behave on the job is the reward structure they face. The behavior of principals can be motivated by their self interest through mechanisms such as parents if the reward system is geared to operate in this way. Kelsey (1983:51) speculated on the basis of his analysis of superintendents' reports on principals that the former use them to establish and reinforce norms. Morris et al. (1981:56) in their investigation were made aware of the way principals are attentive, "for quasi-personal reasons," to the reward system as a matter of both survival and advancement.

The political economy perspective deals directly with the problem of any organization -- how to reconcile individual and organizational goals and prevent displacement. This is a particular problem in organizations like schools which, with a guaranteed budget and clientele, are process-oriented and role based, and do not have to compete through consumer satisfaction. Executives seek what rewards there are through growth and stability and by striking bargains with subordinates, in order to meet minimal environmental expectations, and with externals in order to ensure resources continue to be available. In such situations, the "unofficial benefits," as Perrow calls them, for the staff can constitute very considerable goal displacement.

The complexity of this situation possibly explains why Isherwood and Tallboy (1979) could only describe the results of their investigation of the reward system for forty two Quebec principals as revealing a complex and "dilemmatical" reward system replete with trade offs.

The political economy perspective draws attention to the importance of the school system's reward system in determining principal behavior and to the problem of goal displacement. In drawing attention to resource distribution by the principal and district, it allows detection of influences that operate. For example, as Peterson notes (1980:5), the children of more vocal and hostile parents may be placed with the best teachers.

Unofficial benefits help to explain the recurring efforts to introduce the "sovereignty of consumers" (Lamm,1986) into school systems. If schools have to compete, goal displacement is less likely and there should be more attention to the preferences of parents.

Summary

This brief discussion of theories of schools as organizations and allied research provides a variety of lenses for examining the three sides of the triangle that constitute the environmental control relationship amongst parents, principals and superordinates. Loose coupling theory brings out the need to define the links that bind and coordinate organizations. Societal institutions indicate the significance of commonly held normative frames of reference which legitimate schools and determine expectations of them. Street-level bureaucracy emphasizes the discretion the school professionals have and the power to make policy in action. Environments focus attention on the need for boundary management by the school principal, and the concepts of representation and balance indicate what is involved in achieving optimal relationships with the parental environment. The political economy perspective provides a rationale for the motivation of the actors in the tripartite relationship that is the focus of this study. The remaining sections of this chapter consider each of these groups of actors.

THE PRINCIPALSHIP

The principalship is central to the relationships being examined in this study. A review of the importance and nature of the role sustains the argument that controls on principals are worthy of study. If there is recognition that the role is the key to school functioning and effective schooling, then investigation of the influences that determine principal behavior is well justified. Understanding of how influences affect principal behavior requires consideration of what is involved in principals' work -- what they are required to do and how they do it. The positioning of the principalship at the juncture of various interests establishes its critical importance. Managing relationships amongst these interests is a major component of the role and requires the principal to span school boundaries. To do this and other aspects of the job effectively, in the interests of the school and system, the principal must have discretion. The demands on, and importance of, the role make the abilities and motivation of the principal matters of significance.

Recognition of the Role

Although there are those who prefer to view the principal as "the lowest ranked member of the educational hierarchy," (Allison,1984:11) the growing body of opinion sees the principalship as the key to school administration and the focus of responsibiltiy and accountability (Blumberg and Greenfield, 1980:vii; Martin and Willower,1981:82; Crowson and Porter-Gehrie,1981:27). Weldy (1979:viii) assembles considerable support for the assertion that "The principal of the school is seen by most people as the most important, most influential, and most powerful person in the school." For Glitter (1984:85), "The principal, as educational leader, personifies the school," and Brooks concluded (1984:149) from his study of Alberta principals that to many parents the principal is the school. Donmoyer's case study of an exceptional principal (1985:32) found that "school people and community attributed everthing that went on at the school to the principal." Moreover, the power of principals is growing at the expense of other organizational levels in schooling, as Miles noted (1981:99) and Ewanyshyn recently confirmed (1986:186).

All well-known reviews of research on effective schooling call attention to the importance of school leadership. As Bossert et al. conceptualize the process (1982), the characteristics of the principal, the district and the environment result in principal management behavior whose outcome is a school climate and instructional organization conducive to student learning. Clark, Lotto and Astuto (1984) seem to reach a similar conclusion as their "lessons from America's best run schools" call attention to the principal's leadership. Similarly, Good and Brophy write (1986:596) that "Nearly all studies of effective schools support the importance of principal leadership." And Leithwood and Montgomery (1982:309) consider many studies support the view that the elementary school principal is "the potentially critical determinant in the success of efforts to improve."

An enhanced interest in the results of schooling, as measured by student achievement, and research results associating student achievement with principals' behavior, have helped occasion a paradigm shift, as Boyd and Crowson label it, (1981:317). Consequently, "What educational administrators actually do and what difference it makes for organizational effectiveness are central concerns."

The Principal's Role

Work Description. Although some have despaired of ever comprehensively describing principal behaviors (Leithwood et al.,1983:6; Morris et al.,1982:689) a growing body of research does offer some insights. Surveys of principals themselves have brought to the fore some of the concerns of principals -- what they regard as important to their job. For example, Caldwell et al. (1980) asked principals and superintendents to list the ten most important principal tasks. Predominant were staff matters but principals' sixth ranking was the promotion of a positive school image in the community. Observation studies have drawn attention to the complexity of principals' work, the lack of structure, the brevity, variety and fragmentation and the characteristic verbal interaction (Peterson,1981). However, such studies do not reveal "the intentions, expectations, attributions, purposes and affective states (which) are an important part of what managers 'actually' do" (Martinko and Gardner,1985).

For deeper meanings, ethnographic type studies have been employed and lead to conclusions such as Blumberg and Greenfield's comment (1980:197): "While these principals definitely have a 'framework' for understanding their work world, it only remotely resembles the sort of highly abstract and rational conceptual frames one would find in the usual textbook on school administration." The best known ethnography of a principal is Wolcott's. The kind of insight he offers is well-illustrated by the "live and let live" description of the principal's motivation. The overriding interest was to keep all those with an interest in the school satisfied so that they would not cause trouble (1973:208).

Themes are emerging as more research results describing what the principal actually does become available. One of these is the constant linking -- of school to environment, of school to district, of the internal sectors of the school to each other (Peterson,1981; Grassie, 1979a).

Pivotal Exchange Point. This phrase comes from Crowson and Porter-Gehrie (1980:65) who describe the situation where the principal is at "the most certain point of contact between the school organization and its varied clientele" (1981:51). Morris et al. also use the phrase (1981:14) and go on to describe the principal as the "the working broker between teachers and students on the one hand and the political establishment, superintendent, school board, parent and taxpayer on the other." Kratzman et al. emphasize that the role becomes even more pivotal with decentralization (1980:41).

Others have used different terminology. For Brooks (1984:3), the Alberta principal has " to identify, assess and meet the expectations of all the groups with which he interacts" and these groups include teachers, students, parents, special interest groups, the community, superordinates, school board, the provincial education department, and his professional organization. Miklos (1975:7) writes of the principal's being strategically located for communication.

Some use the political metaphor in describing these "middle persons" who function at the "interface between various constituencies" (Harper and Holdaway,1978:4). "Terms such as influence, negotiation, bargaining, compromise, coalition building, brokership, and lobbying describe many of the activities in which principals are currently engaged" (Williams,1983:11). The principal "mediates among competing demands from school constituencies organized to seek their share of valued allocations from the school system" Wirt (1982:30). Weldy (1979:47) describes how the principal has to decide which groups should be consulted, whose advice needs to be sought, who has to be informed and when, and whose concurrence is needed.

Being in the pivotal position leads to dilemmas for the principal. Lortie (1975) pointed out the principal is answerable for all that takes place in the school but faces the classic administrative dilemma of responsibilities incommensurate with authority, of being pressed to be assertive while under pressure to keep things under control. For Mann (1976:xii), the dilemma lies in representation -- "how can (or should !) the wishes and interests of the publics be reflected in decisions of a professional school administrator." Sackney (1980:1) notes the administrative dilemma of insufficient influence and sees the principal as in the middle organizationally, with dual accountability to school and community, resolving parent/teacher conflict, and having to decide when to allow participation. Morris et al. (1981:152) see a dilemma in the principal's knowing what the school system wants to accomplish, while also knowing what is acceptable to the community. Crow (1984:12) writes of conflicting demands, allegiances and loyalties consequent upon the principal's having a dual role as central office subordinate and school superordinate. For Crowson and Porter-Gehrie (1981:35), the principal must balance constituent interest against professional and organizational demands.

Boundary Management. The positioning of the principalship at the point of contact of the school with varied environments entails a responsibility for establishing satisfactory relationships amongst the components of the school and the components of the environment in order that the main work of the school can be facilitated.

Some see the task as an educative one. For Morgan (1986), the leader must define the reality of others. Bennis (1976:167) says leaders are essentially educators, defining issues and clarifying problems. Crowson and Porter-Gehrie (1981:26) write of "interpreting the organization to its clientele" and the clientele to the organization.

Perhaps the most common perspective is that of buffering which can be conceived of as keeping outside influences under control -- a balancing and stabilizing activity (Crowson and Porter-Gehrie, 1981). Lortie (1975:191 and 200) found teachers' main expectation of the principal was that he keep parents from interfering with their work. Getzels (1980:364) notes the principal is traditionally "placed at the door where the school and community enter into one another." The notion of gatekeeper is a related to boundary management and the principal may establish "an open door, locked door, or swinging door policy to the multitude of constraints bidding for attention." (Hanson,1976-7:33). Schwartz (1981) found control of access to the school a major power of the principal.

Boundary management can also mean adaptation in order to accommodate the environment. Firestone and Wilson (1986) refer to the "long tradition of viewing managers as buffers who interpret the environment to the organization and protect the organization from the effects of external turbulence." They also point out the environment works through these managers to influence the organization internally. Thus, Wirt (1976:74) found that when principals and superintendents had to share control with lay people they became more sensitive and responsive to lay concerns, even about "professional" matters. Similarly, Moore's principals found (1975:4) they had to mediate and negotiate school programs to meet community preferences when advisory councils were established. He concluded (1975:20) the function was one of " adjusting and adapting organizational activities and practices to the surrounding organizational environment of the school parents and community residents, as well as adaptation or adjusting the environment of school parents and community members to organizational activities and practices." Because the function involved mutual adaptation, Schwartz concluded after his study of principals (1981) that "boundary administrator" or "boundary maintainer" described the function best.

As environments cannot be fully controlled and may be turbulent, the only feasible way to manage boundaries seems to be a contingency approach. Because each situation is unique, the norm for principals is customized decision-making (Murphy,1986). Hoyle (1986:19) maintains that only a contingency perspective is adequate where the "central tenets are those of balance and adaptation." For a contingency approach the principal must have discretion. This is emphasized by Crowson and Porter-Gehrie (1981:51) because the principal's discretionary decision-making "provides the order, keeps the staff equanimity, provides the balance between school and community, and protects the resource flow."

Discretion and Power. Discretion in decision-making entails power and the two concepts go together. There seems little doubt that the recognized potential power of the principalship has been growing as Rea (1977) acknowledged, March (1981) found and Ewanyshyn (1986) confirmed. Moves to decentralize and towards subsidiarity give more discretion to the principal but with concomitant responsibilities (Beare,1983:153; May,1983:9). So also does school based budgetting (Alexandruk:1985). The effective schooling research provides a strong case for greater principal discretion, and greater parent participation can increase the power of the principal (Schwartz,1981;Seeley,1956;

Watson,1979).

Bidwell (1965:996) drew attention to studies which demonstrated principals "may redefine and redirect the policies and influence of the superintendent." Since then a number of studies have confirmed that much of the power of the hierarchy resides in the "lowerarchy" (Boyd and Crowson,1981:330). Brieschke (1985:161) brings together much of the evidence and sums up as follows: "A typical school system tolerates considerable variation in performance and is replete with opportunities for local school principals either to play by the book or to engage in creative discretionary behavior." The two major studies on boundary behavior of principals offer confirmation. For Moore (1975:239) a major finding was the large amount of autonomous decision making available to the principal. Schwartz found (1981:304) "selective disregard of elements of district and provincial policy sufficiently widespread . . . to constitute a standard procedure in the day to day operation of schools."

Morris et al. (1981:211) have been the major proponents of the importance of discretion in the principalship. They see it as necessary in order to (a) attain equilibrium with the environment, (b) protect the school and the school system from an uncertain clientele, (c) adapt to the local community, (d) allow personal goals to be achieved, (e) protect core activities, and (f) build sub-unit power.

Principal discretion, however, is constrained. The two seminal studies make that clear. Constraints on the individual can be internal because of who he is, external because of his position, or external because of the expectations and demands of providers and beneficiaries (Gronn,1986:47). Pinero (1982:165) found that she " could only achieve the degree of autonomy that the teaching staff and the community are willing to grant." Wolcott (1973:306) pointedly explains his principal had only the freedom to make no serious mistakes. Wayson (1979:62) similarly writes of the "theys" who control principal behavior, according to principals, and will not tolerate deviance. Murphy (1986), in reviewing Morris et al.'s work, claims they may have overstated the degree of discretion because their focus on specific behaviors neglects common understandings, the informal non-hierarchical controls, and subordinate and external influences.

Given the potential for power of principals, and the varying reports from the literature as to how much discretion they actually can and do exercise, it becomes obvious that much depends upon the first of Gronn's constraints -- the motivation and capacities of the individual principal.

Capacities and Motivation. No clear picture emerges from the research as to the portrait of what a principal should be, although there is a long history of trying to identify characteristics. For Allison (1984:13), the expectations are such that only a "true prima donna" could meet them as principal. The studies of Chapman and Willis (1982) point to the importance of interpersonal competence. Kratzman et al. (1980:41) seem to agree by emphasizing collegial qualities when they venture to describe a capable principal for Albertan conditions.

However, the weight of the evidence seems to be that principal effectiveness is a matter of contingency. No single style is appropriate for all situations (Bossert et al.,1982). A principal must achieve a best fit of administrative style with the host of other important influences. There are, as Dwyer et al. (1982: 593) found, different ways in which principals are effective and any particular way is a simultaneous product of personal beliefs, and variables in the characteristics of the school, its community and district. But most important, they claim, is the manner in which the principal mediates conflicting sources of pressure. Leithwood et al. (1983) point out the danger of sampling studies because they tend to discard differences that may be important. Consequently, many studies which have attempted to describe effective principals by identifying common characteristics may have missed the most important point. The highly individual nature of principal effectiveness is well-illustrated by Donmoyer's study (1985:53) of a very effective principal whose most significant characteristic "was his ability to make apparently contradictory behaviors and beliefs peacefully coexist within his leadership style." Donmoyer speculates that this ultimate contingency style may be "highly functional . . . within a highly complex, multidimensional context."

As far as boundary management is concerned, Schwartz found (1981:300) the differences amongst schools were mainly the result of differing attitudes of their principals. Similarly, Goldring (1986) found the principal's attitude critical in determining parent participation. Moore (1975) identified a "nurturance" constellation of behaviors and attitudes in those principals with a positive attitude and whose schools were most successfully meeting the objectives of having advisory councils.

Motivation is an extraordinarily complex phenomenon, especially when "the careers, activities and perspectives of educational administrators are enmeshed in a normative context" (March,1978:230). It also depends upon the individual's perception of the situation. For example, Wayson writes(1979:60) that "Principals will not exercise leadership unless they acquire more accurate pictures of what a principal can or cannot, should or should not, do and clearer sense about who exerts the strongest influence over what is done." The most useful approach to principal motivation is to assume with Bacharach (1981:23) that, "Every individual or group can be expected to approach a decision with the objective of maximizing their specific interests or goals rather than the maximization of some general organizational objective." This reinforces Boyd and Crowson's (1981:320) political economy approach, which assumes individuals try to maximize their own welfare (or benefits) within the context of the institutional or organizational reward structure. There is additional support from Moore's (1975;296) findings about the importance of the promotion and reward system for principals. Schwartz (1981:237) gives a number of examples to demonstrate that "For principals, there is a certain pragmatic utility to devoting attention to the development, maintenance, and reinforcement of community support."

Summary

Principals are extremely important for schools and instrumental to school effectiveness. Their work is so complex that it is not easily described but a major theme that has emerged is their linking function amongst the various components important to a school. This linking function derives from the critical positioning of the principalship at the interface of so many interests. The principal bears the main responsibility for managing relationships among these interests as an interactive boundary spanner. To perform this function the principal needs, and has, power and discretion, both formally conferred and inherent in the role. How well the boundaries are managed depends largely upon the individual principal's capacities and motivation. The principal must produce a configuration suited to the personal, intraorganizational and extra-organizational constraints, as Eastcott et al. (1974) label them. The most important extra-organizational constraint is the school system.

THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

As schools are the main business of school systems, the behavior of principals is a matter of some moment to them. The principal is also astride the school system's interface with its most important constituency -- parents. In many ways the principalship is the school system's pivotal exchange point with the environment, as well as with major internal constituencies of staff and students. The school system has a considerable stake in the principal's boundary management.

This section looks first at the dilemmas of the school system with regard to school governance and the sometimes disparate expectations the system has of its principals. The school system has to give principals considerable power, and parents the potential to influence them, yet maintain schools on courses consistent with the system's objectives. The system resolves this dilemma through a control system of some complexity and often subtlety. As the responsibility for system control is given to superintendents, their work is briefly examined.

Dilemmas for the System

The school system has its goals and objectives to pursue and these incorporate those of the province because the district itself is part of " a hierarchically ordered set of units nested within larger units" (Ouchi,1978:265). The district and its administrators are responsible for the schools, accountable for what happens in them, and have to coordinate their activities. Consequently, the school system is subject to the "administrative imperative," as Bacharach (1981,vii) calls it, of ensuring "effectiveness and efficiency, which requires certainty and rationality in school administration." A more extreme position is taken by Bates (1983:8) who claims educational administration has a "preoccupation with control" which is "endemic to the occupation."

On the other hand there is the "political imperative inherent in the notion of the school as a local democracy." This is more than ideological. There is very considerable power at the school level which Iannaccone (1985:205) concludes makes "control over school site operations . . . in many ways . . . problematic." Power at the school level derives in part, as Bidwell (1965:1016) explained, from the "considerable and legitimate" power of constituent groups, especially parents.

Conway (1984) agrees that the rationale for participation by citizens is political since the results of empirical inquiry have not confirmed that other benefits are derived. However, there is the effective schooling evidence that parent participation contributes to student achievement (Rossmiller,1986b). Fullan (1982:193) comments on the confusion about the role of parents but asserts there is one remarkably consistent message: "The closer the parent is to the education of the child, the greater the impact on child development and educational achievement."

The dilemma for the school system lies in pursuing its objectives, derived from its educational goals and good management, with relatively autonomous sub-units in which parental influence is legitimated. The agent of the school system for resolving the dilemma is the school principal. But the principal may not assume that role. Pinero (1982:165) writes of how community support " empowers the administrator to represent the school and its constituents." Watson (1979:47) describes how some principals found " the advocacy role has served them well in dealing with central office and the board of education, both of which wish to avoid confrontation as much as possible." In effect, as Morris et al. found (1984:147), "school board and superintendent may be in charge of the organization in a titular sense, but significant administrative direction comes from somewhere else -- the principal's office."

One response of school systems to the dilemma has been to decentralize. This, as Gittell (1977) and Wirt (1976:73) point out, has generally been token administrative decentralization rather than political, as power is given to a lower level in the hierarchy. The failure of school based budgetting to lead to parental involvement is an example which Alexandruk (1985) has documented in Edmonton and Coleman (1986) in British Columbia.

There are other reasons for school systems' giving principals greater autonomy. It may increase their motivation (Peterson,1984:594). It may be recognition of what already exists since Morris et al. (1982) have demonstrated principals characteristically exercise discretion regardless of the rules. Brieschke (1985) notes they are sometimes recognized and rewarded for doing so since the person who gets things done is often approved by society even though rules may not have been followed..

The school system may also recognize the need for discretion at the point of service delivery where problems are unlikely to fit prescriptions -- every situation is unique and schools face very different environmental demands. System policies have to be adapted to local needs and interests and the principal is best positioned to do this. If the school system itself is to be buffered from environmental uncertainty and demands, principals need freedom of action in order to ward off or neutralize potential trouble before it gets out of hand.

Despite the school system's recognition of school (or principal) autonomy, it still needs to pursue its own objectives and so its dilemma is translated into a dilemma for the principal.

Expectations of the Principal

The dilemma for the principal is the school system's expectations of responsiveness to the community while at the same time buffering the school and system against the community. The principal has to resolve the "inherent tension between experts and laymen" as Tucker (1980:7) describes the situation. He must minimize conflict, reduce environmental uncertainty, and be " the good soldier" (Morris et al.,1984:5). The major way in which the principal achieves this is by educating environmental elements about the work of the school and interpreting it for them.

But at the same time the principal is expected to have "an openly reciprocal relationship with parents and community" (Brieschke,1985:161), and maintain positive relations (Peterson,1984:589), as "community involvement of the 'right sort' is highly valued" (Boyd and Crowson,1981:352).

Another useful way of conceptualizing the problem laid at the door of the principal is in terms of what Bacharach (1981:34) sees as the distinction between the authority structure and influence processes. The principal is expected to preserve the former while allowing the latter, which provides the information needed at higher echelons.

In order to ensure principals do achieve the balance expected, the school system maintains a web of controls over principals.

Controls on Principal Behavior

As Ouchi (1978:264) writes, "If organizations have no ability to transmit policy guidelines through many levels of hierarchy, then they are incapable of organized action." This ability is achieved through control which Renihan (1977:44) found is exercised through many dimensions, each of which is integral to and essential for the overall process. Peterson (1983) reached the same conclusions and drew attention to environmental controls which can be considered part of the system because they are encouraged by superordinates, although principals have to learn by experience how to deal with parents (Peterson, 1985). Peterson argued that parents are an environmental control because principals used parent reactions in evaluating their own performance and also because principals thought superordinates used information from parents in evaluation of principals and schools.

Some subsequent research has been done on principal control but none on the role of parents or community. Murphy, Hallinger and Peterson (1985) and Murphy and Hallinger (1986) report on a study of control in effective school districts in which they identified nine or ten controls which were pervasive and interwoven, and controlled school operations, including core activities. Harrison and Peterson (1986:1) confirmed the existence of deviation-sensing evaluative mechanisms for determining whether principals are behaving in approved ways, including the satisfaction of "powerful reference groups in the environment."

Bossert et al. (1982:53) stress the importance of incentive systems related to promotion and evaluation in shaping principal behavior. Boyd and Crowson maintain (1981:359) that "regardless of how people are trained, they will tend to behave on the job in accordance with the reward structure they face." That structure, as Morris et al. (1984:221) note, includes unwritten expectations and traditions for advancement, and Harrison and Peterson (1986) found that although superintendents do not agree, principals believe that the reaction of the public is the most important indicator used by superintendents in evaluation. Consequently, principals emphasized relations with the community and school board in their work.

One aspect of the incentive system which has received little attention is the application of sanctions. When a principal is transferred or loses a position because of inadequate parent relations, a powerful message is conveyed to all principals.

Superintendents' Work

Studies of superintendents' work reveal it is very similar in many ways to that of principals (Boyd and Crowson, 1981:342; Duignan,1979; Pitner,1981), especially in the brokering of various interests. The comparatively small percentage of time spent with principals is often noted. But most superintendents do have ways of getting feedback about schools and the district from parents and the community. These are not usually formalized and are often described by terms like "keeping an ear to the ground," "keeping deflectors up," "reading the greens." Some superintendents deliberately talk to key individuals but more frequently information seems to be gathered in a less organized fashion, often taking advantage of circumstances such as phone calls, speaking engagements, and social functions. As Murphy and Hallinger (1986) found, superintendents are receptive to information from any source and use school visits to confirm or disconfirm it. In this way, through their actions, they may be facilitating parents as a control.

In doing so, superintendents can probably rely on the influence being conservative; surveys like Doherty's (1972) have shown parents value traditional educational goals, and Boyd (1981:356 and 1982a) comments that most are supportive of existing practices and programs. But school systems do set ambitious educational goals for their schools and if they are to be achieved may need to create a climate of influence. Yet superintendents do not appear to do a lot to enlist parental influence for support. Even in the effective school districts examined by Murphy and Hallinger

(1986), superintendents only occasionally disseminated information about district goals to the public. Cuban (1985) has recognized the failure of superintendents to perform their educative role and recently called for a renewed emphasis on their teaching role.

Summary

The school system faces the dilemma of inherent and growing autonomy of schools influenced by their communities, which it must foster, whilst at the same time it has to fulfill its own responsibilities for guiding schools and being accountable for them. It expects the principal to resolve the problem by using his discretion to be responsive to both the community and the system. The principal must manage parents in the system's interests. At the same time the system controls principal behavior through a complex web of mechanisms designed to ensure priority for system goals. Amongst these is parental influence which is encouraged by the system. For the principal it is an interactive process of controlling and being controlled. The influence of parents as a control might be expected to be conservative especially as the superordinates themselves do little to shape its nature.

THE PARENTS

Principals are expected to be responsive to parents but at the same time to manage parental influence in order to buffer both the school and school system against unwanted interference. Principals are subject to an elaborate web of controls, one of which is the requirement to maintain satisfactory relations with the community whose most important component, for principals, is the parents.

This section focuses on parents themselves. First it takes up the questions of whether parents are interested in exerting influence on schools, whether they want greater influence, and what encourages their interest. This is followed by brief consideration of ways in which their influence is exerted.

The Parent Community

Definition of what constitutes the parent community is difficult. Obviously, the community for a small neighborhood school will be much different to that of a large high school. The nature of the parent community also varies with socio-economic status. Hasenfeld (1983:203) shows it is characteristic of human service organizations to be more responsive to higher-status clients. Firestone and Wilson (1986) reported that socio-economic status of parents was reflected in management only at the elementary level. Hallinger and Murphy (1986) have recent results to demonstrate the pattern of parent involvement is dramatically different in effective schools according to parent socio-economic status. In higher socio-economic neighborhoods the school was integrated with the community, and the principal's role, largely shaped by the community, was oriented to boundary spanning. In contrast, where socio-economic status was low, the school was isolated and self-sustaining, with parents minimally involved, and the principal acting mainly as a buffer.

There is wide variation amongst parents and "the parent community" is a very broad concept about which it is difficult to generalize.

Parent Interest

The existence of parental influence on schools is often refuted on the basis that most parents do not demonstrate an active interest. Wirt and Kirst (1982:119) maintain popular participation is only episodic and aroused by specific issues. Fullan (1982:203) says research indicates most parents are only interested insofar as their own children are affected. Grainger (1984) found in Edmonton that the role seen for parents by both the parents themselves and professionals was one of service and support, and Rea (1977) concluded there was little evidence of direct community influence in Alberta.

On the other hand, there is evidence that parents are more interested in influencing schools than is commonly acknowledged. This was White's conclusion (1983) from his survey in British Columbia. He attributed the discrepancy between the belief that parents were not interested and his findings that they were, to a failure to realise how well educated and informed contemporary parents are. Williams (1984) reached similar conclusions from a large scale survey in the U.S.A. where he found parents and professionals receptive to greater parent involvement. Brosseau (1973) reported that 82 percent of Edmonton parents wanted more involvement in the children's schools, while Grainger (1984) found half the parents he interviewed wanted more participation. Hennessy (1985:87) draws upon a number of studies to demonstrate parents want to be involved, and Mitchell (1982:732) points out that wide dissemination of findings from the human relations movement in the study of organizations has led to a widespread belief that participation is administratively sound.

The nature of their involvement may be the determinant of parent interest. There seems to be a discrepancy, as White (1983) observed, between expressed unwillingness to participate and wanting more influence. The discrepancy may be explained through more attention to how parents want to participate and where they want their influence to be effective.

Cattermole and Robinson's (1985) survey of 400 parents in a British Columbia suburb found parents' main interest was in being kept informed and they were prepared to let the authorities make the major decisions. Similarly, Grainger reported (1984) many parents felt underinformed and excluded because they had to initiate most communication with the school. They seemed to want to be able to exert more influence without taking control. These findings are similar to Rea's conclusion (1977) that parents wanted something akin to Arnstein's partnership level where they could participate in decision making without taking an active role in governance.

This desire to influence is reflected in where parents want the locus of control to be. They want it close to them. Rea found the order of parent preferences for control was: school, school/community, board, department. Goodlad's study (1983, 1984:273) concluded that, while parents would leave the running of the school to the principal and teachers, they wanted them to be more accountable through decentralized control to the school level and increased influence on decision making by parents. The interest of Grainger's parents (1984) in being involved in selection of their principal seems to reflect the same sentiments, as does Crowson and Porter-Gehrie's (1981:36) report that the principal's discretionary response to parent requests for special consideration was one of the most effective means for ensuring community support.

Growth of Parent Interest

Parents want more opportunity to influence without necessarily having the final say and they see the means to this through increasing the discretion of the most proximate power figure -- the principal. As they exercise more influence it is likely they will want even greater participation. Although some research has shown parents do not want to participate in school governance, Grainger (1984) found those parents who had participated wanted greater participation. Wirt and Kirst (1982:105) and Gittell (1977:8) make the same point, and Hallinger and Murphy (1986) stress that as parents interact more with the school they have more opportunity to communicate their perceptions and preferences to staff. Laplante (1982) suggests that parent involvement may move through three cyclical stages of (a) information (when the principal wants support), (b) consultation (when administrators want to know needs), and (c) participation (when parents become users of the school and some want to become involved in running it).

Kagan (1984) and Levin (1982) attribute the confusion over parent interest and participation to the absence of any strong theoretical base which would establish the expected benefits and specific goals to guide action. An interesting distinction drawn by Bryden (1982) may indicate how such a theory could be developed. He maintains the representational model only involves participation to advance self interest or instrumental participation. In contrast, he argues, fully effective parent input requires direct or consummative participation so that parents' personal development is enhanced through involvement. Schools may be the ideal small unit for development from a representational model towards direct participation.

The lack of accepted theory may explain why there seems to be a growing consensus that both parents and professionals need training in parent participation. The National Governors' Association in the U.S. is encouraging such provision (Lamm,1986). White (1983) concluded there needed to be detailed planning for involvement and Williams (1984) stressed the need for training. The British green paper (HMSO,1984) takes up the need to find means of associating the whole parent body with the school.

Another strong impetus to greater parent interest is choice, according to the National Governor's Association (Lamm,1986). If parents choose a school then this can be the basis for interest and commitment that builds "gemeinschaft" which Erickson et al. (1979:4) describe as that "condition which exists when the people associated with a school are strongly held together by commitment to each other, to the enterprise as a whole, to the 'special' goals of the enterprise, and to their various tasks in the enterprise." The diversification of programs and services by schools seeking to fill empty classrooms may lead to this kind of enhanced parent interest.

There is also growing evidence of what Levin describes (1982) as the irony of lay involvement organized and promoted by professionals. Yet, for many professionals there is no irony as they believe schools should involve parents and are better places for doing so, as the effective schools literature would encourage them to believe. Boyd (1976:575) wrote of the tradition of participation and an "ethic among school administrators that they ought to be responsive." Grainger (1984:144) commented that the extent of parent involvement depends very much on the disposition of principal and staff. Gunn (1984) found that Alberta principals ranked the satisfaction of, or a supportive attitude from, parents and community, as third amongst indicators of school effectiveness. Goodlad (1984:274) reports all organizational participants would elevate the individual and collective role of parents, and Chase's survey (1985) in the United States indicated teachers at the secondary and intermediate levels were receptive to more parent involvement.

Means of Influencing

The traditional view was that school boards represented the community to the school and the school to the community but, as Cistone (1972:3) writes, it is generally agreed they chiefly legitimate the policies of senior administrators. Wirt and Kirst (1982:135) do not agree fully with this view and refer to the board's indirect influence, such as in selecting its superintendent, or the way boards become more receptive when an issue heats up. However, it is obvious that in a big school organization trustees can do little to convey parental influence at the school level. Furthermore, Brosseau (1973) found in Alberta that trustees were not as good at gauging public opinion on educational issues as professionals, which might imply they are more out of touch.

The evidence cited in the last section indicates parents would prefer to deal with the principal whom, according to Webster (1982), they see as the expert in all educational activities and pursuits, and as essentially a problem solver. This accords with Goodlad's finding (1984:273) that parents want decisions, and those who make them, visible. From the principal's perspective, Grainger's interviewees (1984:327) said they were much influenced by their countless informal contacts with parents, while the parents were confident they could exert influence when necessary. Morris et al. (1984:116) found that while parent-initiated contacts were not frequent, principals would give the contact great care, attention and time. Wirt and Kirst (1982:149) cite a survey of principals on how their job had changed over five years. Consultation with parents was one of the three activities which principals considered had increased the most.

Dealing directly with principals may be the favoured form of contact for parents but most schools also have some form of parent organization. These have been described as "not much more than an extension of the school principal's mimeograph machine" (Mann,1975:166), and simply as a buffer or defence mechanism for the school (Tucker and Zeigler,1980). However, Wirt and Kirst (1982:11) consider that about the mid-1960's parent organizations began to become something more. Even in the 1950s, Seeley et al. (1956:290) reported that the Home and School was important in a Canadian suburb for the way it communicated opinions to the various administrative levels. Morris et al. (1981:136) say few principals were willing to ~~openly~~ ignore their parent groups, and Grassie (1979a), who reported considerable parental influence on principals, said the influential parents for principals were those who attended parent group meetings.

Although a parent group is no guarantee of influence, it does seem, as Cibulka maintains (1979:85), that without some structure for expression of parent views, principals are more inclined to perceive parent interests in accord with the principal's own expectations. Principals can dominate the parent group through their control of the agenda and information, as well as their linguistic skill in influencing (Chapman,1984). But where the principal is appropriately disposed the parent group can function as an effective avenue for parent participation (Fitzgerald and Pettit,1978:50). The line between domination and expected leadership may be difficult to define.

Summary

The collective concept of a parent community is difficult to define as it varies from school to school and with socio-economic status. There is evidence that parents want to influence schools and that this disposition is growing. Parents see the principal as the focus of their influence attempts and want the opportunity of direct contact with a principal who can make decisions. The nature of formal parent groups is changing so that they are exerting more influence but much, in this regard, depends on the individual principal.

CONCEPTUAL BASES

An adequate conceptualization of schools and their environments has yet to be found, as Renihan (1985:133) makes clear when he writes of the "rhetorical maelstrom in which organizational theory has been floundering for the past forty years." The lack of a clear conceptualization was partly the reason this study was designed to be exploratory and to allow for the interpretive frameworks which will be described in Chapter 5 to grow out of the data. However, as Skrtic argues (1985:193), theory that has been generated through previous related research should not be rejected, provided it is not allowed to constrain the inquiry. The review of the literature has provided many concepts, some of which were useful in designing the study and interpreting the data.

The early part of this chapter established (a) the need for research on the principalship and its relations with parents and superordinates, (b) the phenomenon of unrecognized change, (c) the justification for an exploratory type of study, and (d) the reasons for using perceptual data. The following four sections draw upon the literature review for a series of propositions classified according to the four major questions derived from the problem in Chapter 1. These questions involved (a) the existence of parental influence as a significant determinant of principal behavior, (b) the manifestation of parental influence in principal behavior and its importance for the school, (c) the role of the school system in fostering principal responsiveness to parents, and (d) the means by which parents influence. Essentially these four questions focus on parental influence, principals, the school system, and parents, and these are the headings used. As a pervasive characteristic is the interaction amongst the last three, to produce the first, there is unavoidable overlap. The final section lists useful concepts from the earlier discussion of theories.

Parental Influence

The literature suggests the following propositions.

Parental Influence. Principal behavior is influenced by parents but there is little agreement on the extent or nature of the influence.

Balance. The amount of influence parents have on principals and schools will be determined by the balance the principal strikes amongst the various influences or constituencies that are important for the school, and by the individual principal's abilities and dispositions.

Interaction. The parent/principal influence transaction should not be viewed as one way. Each seeks to, and does, influence the other.

Growth. Parental influence on schools has been growing and will continue to grow.

Nature. Parental influence takes a number of forms. Parents are the monitors of society for the institutional legitimation accorded schools and school systems. They create a zone of tolerance in which schools have freedom of action but parents monitor the zone's boundaries to ensure they are not transgressed. As principals are aware of the boundaries or thresholds, and of their vulnerability to parent intervention, their anticipatory reactions form a significant influence on their behavior. Parents also influence principal behavior on specific matters either through direct contact or through formal organizations representing them. Parents exercise indirect influence on principal behavior through their contacts with and influence upon the supra-organizations in which the school is nested.

Principals

The literature suggests the following propositions may be of value in investigating parental influence on principal behavior and its importance for the school.

Behavior. Principal behavior manifests parental influence. Principals endeavour to keep parents satisfied and ensure they have parent support. They treat parent interventions, such as complaints, very seriously. They use parent reactions to evaluate their own work. They pay particular attention to the thresholds of the zone of tolerance in order to ensure they are not exceeded, and through anticipatory reactions principals constrain their own behavior. They try to avoid conflict with parents. They are sensitive to their vulnerability to parents whom they see as monitors of their discretion.

Teachers. Principals buffer teachers against parents in order to allow teachers to get on with the core activities of the school. This buffering may vary from open to closed. When the school is open, principals, through interacting with both staff and parents, manage parental influence to ensure it is directed to appropriate areas of the school and impinges in a manner acceptable to the staff.

Importance. Parental influence on principals is important because principals are important to the school -- they can make a difference. In addition to their formal power which is increasing, principals have considerable discretionary power which they can utilize to accommodate parental influence. How much the school itself is affected by parental influence depends largely upon the principal's attitude and willingness to exercise the discretion available.

Exchange Point. The principal is placed in the strategic position where most of the school's constituencies interface. The most important ones are the teachers, superordinates and parents. For teachers, the principal largely creates the environment since his boundary management of the other two determines their influence on the school. For superordinates, the principal is their agent is ensuring the school conforms to their expectations and in dealing with parents. The principal must buffer the school system against parents both by resolving parent problems and by winning acceptance of school system policies. With regard to parents, the principal has to ensure that they are satisfied, have an acceptable level of influence on the school, and that their views are represented to the school system.

Individual. The individual principal's own capacities and dispositions are a crucial factor in developing the best administrative style for a particular school community. Consequently, the influence exerted by parents on the principal will be determined to a considerable extent by the attitude of the principal and his abilities in working with parents.

School System

The role of the school system in regard to principals and parents is the basis for the following propositions.

Control. School systems have to control principal behavior in order to ensure that system objectives, which also incorporate the objectives of environments in which the system is nested, are pursued in schools. Control is particularly important in view of the power afforded principals by policy, by the support of parents and by the discretion principals have in controlling service delivery through a relatively autonomous sub-unit. This control is achieved through diverse mechanisms ranging from the accepted norms of society to specific directives on particular matters. Because of the nature of principal's work, the difficulties of supervising many principal and school activities, and the unique environment with which each principal has to deal, these controls have to be many, varied and flexible, but together they constitute a powerful constraint on principal behavior. One important control on principals is parental influence.

Buffering. The school system expects principals to buffer it against parents. The principal must be sufficiently responsive to parents to maintain their support for both the school and the system but at the same time must ensure that their influence on the school system is appropriately constrained and channelled.

Reward System. The school system uses its reward system (including sanctions) as a control of principal behavior. Insofar as the incentive system encourages principal sensitivity and responsiveness to parents, it is facilitating parental influence.

Encouragement of Parental Influence. The school system encourages parental influence in many ways. It may facilitate parent involvement with the school, even to the extent of providing formal means for that influence. It can publicise its expectations of both parents and principals with regard to parental influence. Through actions, such as the way it responds to parent interventions, it can emphasize the importance to be attached to parents, and by directing parents to the principal it can make clear who has the responsibility for satisfying parents. It can pursue policies that open up schools to parents so that they have greater opportunities to observe and influence.

Shaping Parental Influence. Through its efforts to publicise its policies, through the publicity it gives to notable achievements, through its expressed expectations, and through its responses to parent initiatives, the school system can mold the influence which parents exert on principals.

Parents

Pertinent characteristics of parents, and the means through which they influence principals, are drawn from the literature as follows.

Interest. Parents want to influence schools and they perceive the principal as the key to effectively doing so. Parents want responsiveness at the school level with a principal who has sufficient discretion to accommodate their preferences. Only some parents want to be formally involved with school governance but this proportion is likely to grow as more parents experience involvement and participation.

Means. Parents influence principals through a variety of means. The most obvious are their direct contacts with principals and their involvement in formal parent groups established to give them a channel of influence. They influence less directly through the attitudes their children take to school, through their presence in the school, and through the support they give school activities. Even more indirectly they can exert influence through their contacts with the school system, the publicity they give their attitudes towards the school, and through their attempts to enlist support, whether it be from fellow parents, the principal's superordinates or at the political level.

Those Who Influence. All parents contribute to establishing the zone of tolerance within which principals have discretion. All are monitors of its boundaries and one dissatisfied parent can arouse a significant proportion of parents. Generally, however, most parents do not actively try to influence. Of those who do, and are accommodated to some extent, the majority are of higher socio-economic status. Those who are committed by choice of a school or costs will exert more influence.

Forms. Parental influence takes a number of forms. The primary one derives from their interest in their own children and is directed to their welfare. The other forms derive largely from the first. Parents know the norms of their own community and act as monitors of the school to ensure it conforms to them, though they are open to cooptation in support of innovation. Parents carry the common cultural understandings which legitimate the school and act as monitors of the school's conformity.

Theoretical Perspectives

The review of theories about schools as organizations produced the following propositions which appeared to be useful for this study.

Couplings. Control mechanisms are couplings. If non-structural mechanisms, such as parental influence, are a strong constraint for schools, then schools cannot be considered loosely coupled in the commonly accepted meaning of the term and attention needs to be focussed on the nature of the couplings themselves.

Societal Legitimation. Because schools are legitimated through their conformance to societal expectations of what a school should be, the principal, as manager of relations with the environment, must be concerned with promoting the image of the school and demonstrating it has parent support.

Vulnerability. People in school organizations are vulnerable to environmental interventions and although they can control these to some extent, seek to avoid or forestall conflict by closely observing the thresholds or boundaries of the zone of tolerance allowed them.

Monitoring. Principals and their superordinates are the main internal monitors of the thresholds of the zone of tolerance and parents are the main external monitors.

Discretion. Principals have such considerable potential discretion that they can make actual policy for the school system, as well as the school, if control systems are inadequate.

Environments. School environments are complex and multidimensional. The task of managing relations with these environments is a primary function of the principal who is strategically placed to achieve the necessary balance amongst environmental and internal influences.

Interaction. Boundary management is an interactive process involving both buffering against external influences and adapting to or accommodating them.

Balance. The principal has to establish a balance which satisfies the community (parents) that it is represented and meets the expectations of teachers and superordinates for the buffering of their work against unwanted interference.

Contingency. Successful boundary management involves a contingency approach in that the style adopted by the principal has to be a product of the principal's own capacities, the nature of the school and its community, the characteristics of the wider organization, and any other influences that are salient for a particular situation.

Self-interest. Principals, like other people, can be expected to pursue their self-interest and the operation of the incentive system of the organization will influence their behavior according to the way they perceive that system.

SUMMARY

This chapter has drawn attention to the importance of gaining additional knowledge about parent-school-school system interaction. It has also shown that change in patterns of interaction can occur without being adequately acknowledged. The major pertinent theories of the last decade or so have been examined for the light they throw on the triangular relationship and the research has been considered from the perspective of each of the three groups -- parents, principals and superordinates. From the literature a descriptive conceptualization was presented, organized about the four major questions derived from the problem presented in Chapter 1. Significant concepts were derived from theories about schools as organizations in order to guide the study and form a basis for discussion of the theoretical implications of the findings.

The following chapter describes how a research design was developed in order to investigate the problem.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter, which outlines the design of the study, is divided into four major sections concerning (a) orientation, (b) nature and sources of data, (c) instrumentation, and (d) quality controls.

ORIENTATION

Goetz and Le Compte (1984) suggest that rather than pretend it does not exist, the researcher should acknowledge his or her own subjective experience and frame of reference and endeavour to assess any distortion, or at least allow the reader to do so. This section outlines the stance from which this study was conducted.

Paradigms and Metaphors

The theoretical debate over paradigms, one's basic frame of reference for interpreting the world, is unlikely to be resolved. Guba (1985) describes the contrasting views as positivistic and naturalistic paradigms, each of which has many variations, and maintains that the two cannot be compromised and that there has to be a choice in research of one or the other. However, he does point out that many who try to reconcile the opposing views are confusing methods with paradigms or world views. For example, Miles and Huberman (1984:20) wrote that "few researchers are not blending these two perspectives," and claimed this is justifiable or even preferable, provided due attention is given to the problems of drawing valid meaning from the data. It seems that in following them this study mixes methods and should be cast in the naturalistic paradigm. Quantitative methods are used because they throw light on some of the multiple realities, rather than because they define a single reality. Moreover, heavy reliance on perceptual data implies a naturalistic view.

People construct their own realities. An organization exists only in the minds of people. Control exists insofar as people allow themselves to be influenced, consciously or unconsciously, as part of their organizational reality. Analysis of the perceptions of appropriate organizational participants should reveal the organizational reality of control. As Sackney (1980:4) writes, "People carve out roles from the reality that they see." While reported perceptions, being 'research triggered', sometimes unstable and subject to the problems outlined later, have weaknesses as data, they do offer a practical means of arriving at some idea of what control means for those in the organization. Schwartz (1981:7) describes this view.

> Through the act of perception, which is itself a screening of reality through the effects of their own accumulated experience, individuals in effect construct the particular reality which underlies their subsequent actions and reactions. To the extent that such experience has been shared, that reality is socially constructed and held in common by members of a group.

The orientation of the researcher accords with many scholars. Morgan (1986) believes there is an unlimited number of metaphors in which thinking about organizations may be couched, and that each of these probably has something to contribute as a different perspective on complex phenomena. This is similar to Lincoln's (1985) emerging paradigm for research in which there is a place for many different perspectives on reality, with each contributing something. Willower (1980 and 1986:35) makes much the same point. Morey and Luthans' claim that both emic (insider's) and etic (outsider's) orientations are needed for a complete research perspective. Renihan (1985:129) has argued that the "phenomena themselves (should) dictate the conceptual framework and the further course of the inquiry." And Murphy (1986:126) thinks use of normative theories and models to understand the role of the principal is akin to using "high beams to see more clearly in the fog: the area of illumination is increased yet clarity of vision is reduced."

Type of Study

The study was a pilot study as a search of the literature did not reveal any comparable in-depth examination of parental influence as an environmental control mechanism constraining principal behavior. Because it was a pilot study, the main purposes were to explore and describe. It sought, in Kerlinger's words (1973:406), "to discover significant variables in the field situation, to discover relations among variables, and to lay the groundwork for later, more systematic and rigorous testing of hypotheses." Propositions were developed in a very general sense only in order to identify variables associated with principal behavior, as reported by the respondents, and to develop an understanding of those variables in operation. The refinement of initial propositions to arrive at those that constitute the conclusions was a major purpose of this study.

This study might also be described as a field survey in which a questionnaire was supplemented by semi-structured interviews and some document analysis in order to add depth to the data and allow for triangulation. As such it has some of the features of Ary et al.'s (1985:337) descriptive survey, which basically inquires into the status quo and attempts to measure what exists without questioning why it exists; and of their explanatory survey, which attempts to explain attitudes and behavior on the basis of data gathered at a point in time.

Focus of the Study

As stated in Chapter 1, the basic research problem was to examine whether principal work behavior is controlled to any significant degree by parental influence and whether superordinates promote this control mechanism. Four major questions suggested perspectives on this problem. The first asked whether parental influence is a significant environmental determinant of principal work behavior. The second looked for evidence of whether the influence can be identified in principal work behavior and asked whether this makes a difference for the school. The third was concerned with the principal's superordinates and their role in facilitating the influence of parents on the principal. Finally, the fourth asked how organizational participants perceived parents actually exercised influence.

These four major questions highlight the environmental control and the three groups of actors involved. The literature, preliminary investigations and discussions suggested sub-questions for each which might guide the investigation.

Environmental control.

1. Is there significant parental influence on principals?
2. Is it increasing?
3. What is its nature?

Principals.

1. What in principal behavior indicates they are responsive to parents?
2. Are the principal's subordinates, teachers, affected by parental influence?
3. How important for the school is parental influence on its principal?
4. What is the principal's role in regard to parents and superordinates?

Superordinates.

1. Does parental influence constitute a system of control over principals?
2. Does the district's reward system facilitate parental influence?
3. Do superordinates encourage parents to exert influence on principals?
4. Do superordinates shape parental opinion in order to influence principals?

Parents.

1. What are the characteristics of parents which lead to influence on principals?
2. What are the formal and informal means through which parents influence principals?

3. Are there different forms of parental influence?

NATURE AND SOURCES OF DATA

In this section consideration is given to the nature of most of the data gathered in this study. While perceptions may often be the best data source, the complexities of perceptual data need to be understood if analysis is to be properly guided. The sources of data are described, together with the rationale for choosing them.

Nature

In using perceptions as data, the study deals with very complex phenomena. Goetz and Le Compte (1984:90) point out that research using perceptions relies upon the interpretation of reality by others: "Information gathered is a function of persons who give it." But on the other hand, "People behave on the basis of *what is perceived* rather than *what is*" (French et al.,1985:147). The latter authors summarize much of what has been learned about perception. Only some of reality is selected for attention and the selection is determined by factors such as the tendency towards the supportive and satisfying and away from the disturbing. Past experience, values, attitudinal set or a propensity to act in a certain way, can all impose an interpretation on the objective phenomena which becomes the actuality of what is perceived. Closure is the tendency, within the act of perceiving, to completeness by adding whatever is needed to make it meaningful and supportive.

Allied to the phenomenon of perception is the concept of "attribution", which the same authors maintain is crucial to an understanding of behavior in organizations, since inferring motives from the behavior of other people is pervasive. Curtis (1983) discusses attribution theory in some detail, as do Frasher and Frasher (1981). People integrate the stimuli impinging upon them to arrive at causal explanations for what happens -- they ascribe causality to their own and others' beliefs. It is important to note, as Curtis (1983:8) does, that there is much evidence that attributions are open to distortion, bias and/or defensiveness in order to fulfil the self-protective or self-serving purposes of the perceiver. Particularly important for this study may be the finding that there is considerable effort on the part of the perceiver to maintain a sense of personal control and freedom. Since the Alberta principals Curtis studied had, predominantly, an internal locus of control orientation, the possibility exists that principals in this study underrated the importance of external influences on them.

The nature of perception may make it difficult to assess the true nature of parental influence on principals if principals find it perceptually difficult to acknowledge external loci of control. Data were gathered from other organizational participants in order to offset this potential bias. However, striking findings by Gladstein (1984) suggest distortion of perception can be pervasive in an organization. Her study indicates that in gathering the perceptions of organizational participants there is the possibility that those perceptions will be to some extent the product of common, and possibly erroneous, learning experiences or theories. Greenfield (1976:14) makes a somewhat similar point:

> The horror of Simon's neutered science appears fully only with the realization that it conforms almost perfectly with the view that administrators want to have of themselves : that they are instruments of objective, self-less, rational decision-making.

Zeigler et al. (1977:223) discussed the difficulties inherent in survey research because of the removal from reality involved in perceptual data. They claim survey research sacrifices depth for breadth especially because there is no indication of the accuracy of the perceptions. "Because of these limitations the question, 'who says what to whom with what effect?' can be only partially answered by survey research." This study endeavored to overcome such limitations by concentrating on a single and relatively small system in order to get a comprehensive coverage, by surveying at four participant levels in the organization, and by supplementing the survey with semi-structured interviews to give depth and provide triangulation (along with a document analysis). The approach of supplementing survey data with more in-depth data gathering, accepts the thrust of the following argument by Schwartz (1981:37) while retaining the value of the survey, especially in getting a wider spectrum of perceptions.

> The importance of perception and interpretation by decision makers within the organization as intervening variables necessitate the use of qualitative methodology for the investigation of the process of environmental adaptation, for it is only through such methodology that perception and interpretation can be accounted for adequately.

Sources

In choosing data sources, a purposive (Patton,1980:107), rather than random, selection was made because of the nature of the study and practical limitations. The data collected were restricted to elementary schools because of these considerations and because most related research has been done with elementary schools. In view of the exploratory nature of the research it would be premature to introduce other levels of schooling, especially as the levels may be quite different organizationally. For example, Firestone and Herriott (1982,1984,1986) point out that elementary schools and senior highs differ in organizational structures, types of programs, teaching methods, characteristics and needs of students, and administrative procedures. The former resemble rational bureaucracies, while the latter are loosely coupled or anarchic. Greenfield (1982:35) comments in a similar vein and Mann (1971) found some tendency for elementary principals to be more responsive to their communities. Some confirmation of differences was obtained during this study as a number of respondents referred to the decline in parent involvement as children progressed to higher levels.

A deeper understanding of the context and the operation of the mechanism was sought through intensive study of one reasonably small school system. While a wider survey may have had sampling advantages, it would have provided leaner and less useful information.

Time limits and available resources meant data sources had to be restricted. An important consideration was the desire to establish as much personal contact as possible in order to arouse genuine interest, encourage cooperation,and improve the return rate.

Cooperation in completing the questionnaire was initially sought from the following organizational participants who were in a position to observe parental influence in school and system operations and were involved in those operations.

Trustees. The seven represent the community and parents.

Senior Administrators. The eight were members of the executive council and had a professional education background.

Principals. They were from all the elementary schools.

Teachers. Three were to be chosen from each elementary school.

Details of the actual respondents are given in the following chapter. Where there was non-cooperation from trustees, senior administrators or principals, contact was made to determine whether this indicated any significant bias.

Semi-structured interviews were sought with all trustees, all senior administrators, and both random and purposive samples of principals and teachers from their respective groups.

Data were not sought from parents and other members of the community because of the difficulties of obtaining an adequate sample and response rate and because, as non-organizational participants, their overall knowledge is possibly inadequate for the research purpose.

Previous research, such as that by Meyer et al. (1978) and Louden (1980), indicates that there may be discrepancies in the perceptions of various categories of participants (principals, teachers and superintendents). Schwartz (1981:41 and 63) reviews a number of studies to illustrate the apparent "perceptual paradox and mutual misunderstanding" that characterizes the differing perceptions of principals and superintendents. The data from this study were examined to determine whether such differences exist and whether this had any significance for the problem.

Documentation

A search was conducted during the study for any documentation which might be relevant to the problem or provide background information. While material with direct reference to parental influence was of obvious relevance, the researcher was aware that other documents could, for example, indicate attitudes by the absence of any such reference.

Each interviewee was asked for suggestions as to documents that might be of use. The researcher asked for access to documents he thought might be of use and documents were collected in the course of the study, e.g., when attending board meetings, from the communications officer, school parent handbooks when visiting schools, from the rack in the foyer of the district's central office. Access was also gained to the district's library and the library and publication resources of the provincial education department. The provincial teachers' association provided a list of references to parents in the "Teacher's Handbook" as the only policy documentation the association has on the relationships of schools and parents. Some documents were provided by the provincial school trustees' association and the provincial catholic school trustees' association.

A written request was made for two categories of documents which the researcher considered might be of value. They were the records of conference meetings held fortnightly between trustees and senior administrators, and area superintendents' records of the few individual principal assessments that have been done and of the annual goal setting. Access was denied on the grounds of lack of relevance.

The researcher was also alert to documentation that might be available in the press or as part of the school board elections that were held during the study. A file of press clippings and elections brochures was accumulated.

Documentation proved to be a limited data source. This itself may be indicative of the way in which parental influence operates or even of its importance. As a consequence, document analysis played a minor part in the study and is referred to only when it can illustrate or add to the information derived from the two major data sources.

Appendix C lists the documents which might identify the school district studied, while others are included in the bibliography.

INSTRUMENTATION

Two instruments were developed for data collection -- a questionnaire and an interview schedule. This section reviews the background to each instrument and describes the instrument and its construction.

Questionnaire

Advantages. A questionnaire is convenient to use, practical, and a comparatively economic means of collecting data. It allows a wider coverage of potential respondents. According to Mouly (1978:84) the impersonal quality of the questionnaire might mean that responses are more objective and candid as respondents feel freer to express unpopular and troublesome views. Ary et al. (1985:344) claim that the questionnaire avoids the potential source of bias that exists in the interview situation because of the interviewer's appearance, mood, conduct, etc. Because the questionnaire allows for greater uniformity in the way questions are asked and the mode of response can be controlled as desired, responses are more comparable and this assists in data analysis.

Disadvantages. Some disadvantages of the questionnaire have already been discussed in regard to perception. There is always the possibility of misinterpretation of

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the questions, particularly in a study using concepts with a range of meaning. The neat and convenient categorization involved in design can itself be a restrictive influence. There is the possibility of non-respondents reflecting a bias which is not recognized by the researcher. "It cannot be assumed that nonresponse is randomly distributed throughout a group. Studies have shown that there are usually systematic differences in the characteristics of respondents and nonrespondents to questionnaire studies" (Ary et al.,1985:345). Consequently, in this study, where it appeared desirable, efforts were made to determine whether a bias was operative. Grassie (1979a:13,14) mentions another possible weakness in that a questionnaire may put ideas into the respondent's mind and force "him to respond to items or issues which may not be in the least important to him and to which he has never previously given any thought." Perrow (1982:686) carries this concern further with the claim that questionnaires tend to create the world the researcher wants to find. These concerns must be balanced against a point made earlier -- whether a subject's own perception of his motivation is an adequate account of that motivation. Although respondents occasionally made the point that they had "never looked at it that way before" this does not necessarily invalidate the perspective.

Construction. Construction of the questionnaire was a major project. The initial content of the questionnaire was drawn from an extensive review of the research and literature, from the gleanings of the researcher's own experience, and from consultation with students and faculty of the Department of Educational Administration. The initial draft was revised four times as described in the later section on pilot-testing.

The advice of Ary et al. (1985:345-47) was followed closely. The appearance of the questionnaire reflected quality. It was as brief as possible. Respondents had all the information needed, and phrasing facilitated understanding and was unbiased. The items were as short as possible, and required unambiguous answers. Care was taken to avoid misleading through unstated assumptions, confusing through double-barreled questions, and arousing embarrassment, suspicion or hostility. Easy questions, seeking interesting information, and clearly related to the topic were placed at the beginning. Requests for personal information were in Part II where their relevance was more obvious. Questions were grouped with regard to content, type and good psychological order. Except for the final item, all questions were of the closed type.

In layout, attention was given to attractiveness, ease in reading and answering, and convenience in coding and scoring. Questions were numbered consecutively, as were pages, and advice on turning pages was included. Questions, answers and directions were clearly distinguishable and, as far as possible , answers involved a selection from numbers arranged on a scale in a consistent high to low pattern.

Considerable efforts were made to assure respondents of confidentiality and anonymity. Because of the need to compare categories of respondents, to identify non-respondents for examination for possible bias, and to sample principal and teacher respondents for interview, the questionnaire was coded to allow the researcher to identify individual respondents. To overcome any effect this might have, respondents were advised of the reasons, assured in the strongest possible terms that only the researcher would have access to the returns, and given, as far as possible, the opportunity to meet with the researcher in order for rapport to be established and doubts settled.

Description. A copy of the questionnaire is in Appendix A. The front page of the questionnaire solicited cooperation, gave a brief description of the purpose of the research, indicated the nature of the responses required, and guaranteed anonymity. It was headed by the University and Department banners, and mentioned the supervisor could be contacted. An accompanying, individually addressed letter, on Departmental letterhead, explained the reasons for approaching the respondent, outlined the procedure to be followed, entreated assistance and endeavoured to establish rapport.

Part I has thirty questions dealing with parental influence or allied matters.

Responses are required on a four point scale ranging from "very important" to "very unimportant". An even numbered scale was selected to ensure responses were an opinion rather than an expression of neutrality.

Part II has a different form for each of the respondent groups, athough a number of the questions are similar. Personal information regarding experience is sought together with some perceptions regarding the problem from the viewpoint of the respondent.

Part III provides a page for "additional comments."

Trials indicated that respondents could complete the questions in about twenty five minutes.

Semi-structured Interview

Advantages. Conduct of a limited number of semi-structured interviews as an additional source of data allowed for validation of information obtained from the questionnaire, provided a richer perspective, and tapped the advantages of qualitative material. Interviews sometimes elicited unanticipated information of significance. They allowed the researcher control over the data collecting situation and flexibility in questioning the respondent.

The semi-structured interview mode was adopted because, as Macoby and Macoby (1954:454) wrote, the semi-structured approach is a useful compromise, being sufficiently structured to elicit in a consistent fashion information pertinent to the questionnaire, but sufficiently open to bring to light individuals' perceptions of other significant dimensions of their experience. Reliability is enhanced by the structured and standardized characteristics while validity is gained from the openness. Other authorities have also recommended the technique. Merton et al. (1956:43) claim the non-directive interview can "uncover a diversity of relevant responses, whether or not these have been anticipated by the inquirer. . . . It gives the interviewee an opportunity to express himself about matters of central significance to him rather than those presumed to be important by the interviewer. " Gordon (1975:61) describes the semi-structured interview as giving "the interviewer some choice as to the order of the questions, freedom to attempt alternative wordings of the same question, and the freedom to use neutral probes if the first response to a question is not clear, complete or relevant." And finally Guba (1980:10) advises, "Some elements of the design can always be specified in advance , and the wise inquirer will specify all such elements as he can while retaining a flexible posture that permits changes and emendations as the situation may dictate."

Other potential advantages include: greater respondent cooperation because of the personal contact and the reluctance some may have to put their views in writing; the ability to guide the interpretation of the questions in order to ensure a uniform meaning; the capacity to ask for repetition of answers or explanation of meanings; the control over the order in which questions are considered; and the additional information gained from observation of the subject in the interview situation and from the total context of the interview.

Disadvantages. Besides the expensive and time-consuming nature of the interview, which limits the number of respondents, other potential problems had to be guarded against. Reliability can be adversely affected by a reluctance to reveal confidential information, by the personal biases of the interviewer that may become apparent during the interview, and even by the interviewer's mood, dress and reactions. The interviewer could not normally record all that occurred and in choosing what to record endeavoured to minimize selectivity of perception and possible bias.

Construction. The basic format of the interviews followed Bouchard's (1976:371) Type II with specified questions and the character of the responses left open -- ' open-ended' or 'free response'. As Ary et al. (1985:343) point out, "The open-ended question is preferred for more complex questions where the researcher is interested in identifying the subject's understanding of an issue, the frame of reference used in responding, or the motivations underlying the response." The conduct of the interview maintained flexibility so that the interviewer could prompt, probe, and seek further explanation.

The questions in the interview schedule were based on the issues raised in the questionnaire and others, not amenable to the questionnaire format, which emerged as of possible significance from the literature, experience, preliminary studies and discussion. During interviews the respondents were invited to address in greater detail the broad issues which might have a bearing on the problem.

Further details of development of the schedule are given in the account of pilot-testing.

Description. The interview schedule, which is in Appendix B, has two parts. The first part consists of questions asked of all interviewees. They are numbered G1 to G11 with the "G" indicating "general." The second part has a different form for each of the four respondent groups with eight questions (T1 to T8) for trustees, nine for senior administrators (A1 to A9) and principals (P1 to P9), and seven for teachers (S1 to S7). For each question in each part a number of supplementary questions is provided. These were designed to be used where prompting was necessary, particular aspects of the question or associated matters were of interest, and when time permitted.

In order to reflect the advice of Merton et al. (1956:43), the guide or schedule was not followed too rigidly, so as to tap subjective experiences and concerns and to follow-up hints. The schedule was used as a flexible tool allowing the interviewer to respond to cues and implications. This also accords with the advice of Good (1972:238) that the processes of communication and interaction, based on a shared language and terminology, permit the collection of complete and frank answers from the respondent -- primarily subjective data that is a direct description of the world of experience of the respondent. He also advocated intermingling of the structured and unstructured, with the interviewer asking questions of a spontaneous nature as the need arises, particularly in order to flesh out areas of concern.

In preparing the interview schedule, content validity was sought through testing with a variety of people widely experienced at all levels of education and its administration in the province. One of the objects was to ensure questions would have the same meaning for all respondents.

For the interviews, the researcher endeavoured to establish the desirable rapport, in order to preclude any feeling on the part of the interviewee that there was a need to make a good impression, and to encourage forthrightness. Respondents were at their ease and the interviewer was careful to avoid reacting with shock, disapproval, or any other emotion, except encouragement to be frank and complete. Confidentiality was a matter of personal assurance by the researcher, who detailed the ways in which the data were to be secured, handled, analyzed and presented. Questions were generally presented in the same order with the same wording, though the open response format often made this difficult.

The researcher was conscious of possible problems with his own frame of reference in conducting the interviews and in recording. However, he had been involved in about thirty interviews with trustees, senior administrators, principals, teachers, parents and community members as part of a school system audit and had attended full meetings of two different school boards. He conducted some preliminary research on the question of community influence on principals by interviewing knowledgeable and experienced people and had the advantage of extensive pilot testing of the instruments.

QUALITY CONTROLS

In order to ensure the highest quality in the data gathered the instruments were pilot tested and consideration was given to reliability, validity, triangulation, and trustworthiness. Care was taken to ensure ethical standards were observed.

Pilot Testing

The instruments were pilot tested to establish content validity, ensure they would elicit the information sought, and "de-bug" them of faults. As many people as possible with knowledge in the problem area and/or skills in instrument construction were involved in completing the instruments, critically assessing them and making suggestions for improvement. Where appropriate, subjects were dealt with personally and individually in order to engender maximum cooperation, derive benefit from discussion and observe reactions.

Pilot testing was an ongoing and an interactive process between questionnaire and interview schedule. The researcher's supervisor contributed constant and meticulous appraisal of the instruments and other members of the supervisory committee reviewed drafts.

Interview Schedule. The first draft of the interview schedule was used in interviewing, for another project, the deputy minister, the assistant deputy minister (field services) of the provincial education department, a doctoral student with thirteen years experience as a district superintendent in the province, and a very experienced academic who had been, for many years, a student of school governance and had served a term as trustee. Six others were interviewed using various drafts of the schedule. They were: a teacher who was a master's student and a former trustee in the subject district; the executive director of the provincial catholic schools trustees' association; the assistant superintendent (counselling) in the district; the communications officer for the district; a parent who had been active in parent advisory committees in the district and was a candidate for trustee; and the district's research coordinator. These people were also asked to comment on the questionnaire.

Questionnaire. The first draft was revised after being exhaustively reviewed by the researcher's supervisor. The second draft was critiqued by the members of the supervisory committee and a fellow student in the educational administration doctoral program before being revised. The third draft was pilot tested with thirty one members of two summer session educational administration master's classes, and four full-time graduate educational administration students (two masters, two doctoral). Many of these people were parents, eleven were principals (including two from the district studied), twenty were teachers (including one with experience as a trustee), and three were senior administrators (including one from the subject district). All drafts used in the pilot testing included the four versions of Part II intended for the four groups of organizational participants, with subjects asked to complete the one most relevant to them, while commenting on the others.

While the main concern in pilot testing was to ensure the instrument would yield the information sought, respondents were asked to look critically in any direction -- content, form, clarity, appropriateness, acceptability, comfort, motivation, embarrassment, redundancy, relevancy, ambiguity, overlap, readability, comprehensiveness, etc.

An additional major question for principals, to measure influence in different areas of school operation, was included at the suggestion of the supervisory committee. It was first adapted from Grassie (1979) and then, after being critiqued by the research supervisor, adapted to Miklos' (1975) six major task activity areas for principals. This version was reviewed by the supervisory committee and four doctoral students before being incorporated in the fourth draft of the questionnaire.

The fourth draft was the result of the pilot testing. The questionnaire had been reformatted, questions had been reworded and some were discarded, collated comments had been considered, suggestions incorporated where it was considered desirable, and the numerical data had been analyzed. Comments made on the third draft were generally useful and informative. Some respondents commended the questionnaire and a number indicated the problem was an area worthy of study. A review of these comments after completion of the research revealed that the pertinent ones were also made by some respondents during the major study.

Only one generally critical comment was received. A teacher wrote that all the items were essentially "motherhood" questions and asked: "Given the make-up of public education, how can one answer most of these with a '3' or '4' ?"

The fourth draft was distributed for final review and comment to the supervisory committee, four doctoral students who had not previously been involved, a parent and school secretary, and three officers of the subject school system. As a result of comments received, a question was altered and and a number of minor amendments made before the questionnaire was finalized. The last step was to consult with the department's programmer/analyst on the best coding arrangements.

Reliability and Validity

Any study must give attention to matters of reliability and validity, though sometimes different terminology is used. They are particularly important when instruments are used and have to be addressed if any confidence is to be had in the results. (Dressel,1976:119) For this study no previously used instruments were available and so instruments had to be constructed and measures taken to ensure they were as valid and reliable as possible.

Most definitions of reliability refer to the consistency of measurement provided by an instrument, e.g., "consistent in the measurement of whatever it measures" (Mouly,1970:115); "Reliability refers to the reproducability of a set of measurements. It has to do with consistency or stability of measurements over time" (Dressel,1976:120); "Reliability ... refers to the consistency with which the scores on a test are related to the scores on the same test given a second time." (Engelhart,1971:151)

Some means of establishing reliability were precluded in this study because of the time and expense involved and the antagonism that might develop in respondents, e.g., test-retest. In exploratory studies there are exceptional difficulties in establishing reliability. It is important, however, to take all possible measures to ensure temporal stability.

Validity is a more difficult concept with sometimes the simplicity of the definition belying the complexity of the subject. Validity, according to Mouly (1970:116), is the extent to which an instrument measures what it purports to measure. For Engelhart (1971:151), validity is the characteristic of a test most fundamental to its effectiveness, "how well it measures what it is designed to measure." Locke (1976:1337) expands one aspect to write of content validity as, "the logical relationships between the conceptual definition of the concept or phenomenon being measured, and the methods used to measure it (e.g., the particular content of the questions asked of the subject)." Ensuring validity also involves eliminating all possible sources of bias which might affect the results, other than those which are the concern of the study. Thus Good (1972) points out the need to be concerned with the perceived intent of the instrument, the timing of the request, the nature of the setting in which it is administered, the favourable reputation (integrity and knowledge) of the researcher, and the adequacy and length of the instrument. Ensuring confidentiality assists in achieving validity. Kerlinger (1973:456) emphasizes the need for trust where respondents are being asked to supply information about personal attitudes and beliefs. He advocates personal contact with the opportunity to question, using the data only for the purposes stated, ensuring anonymity, and giving respondents the results.

Validity was enhanced in this study through a variety of additional actions and conditions. Pilot testing was one. Others were the involvement of experts in education and schooling whenever possible; the exhaustive review of theory and research; the researcher's experience and preparation for the study; the highly educated nature of nearly all the subjects who might be presumed to be capable of understanding the questions and expressing themselves; the guaranteed anonymity; the quality of the presentation; the involvement attained in asking for personal thoughts; and the promise of feedback. All contributed significantly to establishing validity as well as assisting in reliability.

The Questionnaire. While every effort was made to ensure reliability, there is no clear cut test. However, there is reason to consider it was adequate as Mouly (1978:195-196) claims a reliability test may not be crucial in a heterogeneous type of questionnaire and that "ensuring validity might be a better investment of one's time and energy."

Mouly (1978:195) also points out that both the validity of the individual questions and of the instrument as a whole are important. All items included must be relevant to the topic under investigation, there should be a complete coverage of the overall topic, and clarity in presentation. He emphasizes the importance of the questionnaire's having sufficient appeal to ensure a high rate of return, of its relating to the problem and being free of leading questions, ambiguous or irrelevant items. The pilot testing would appear adequate to cover such requirements, as well as the other items detailed previously.

Ex-post validity was established to some extent through soliciting additional comments, and the semi-structured interviews constitute another validity check. The returns were examined for any evidence of a response set. The self-enhancement factor was countered by the assurances of anonymity and the full explanation of purposes in a manner that removed any threat. Ary et al. (1985:357) agree that a suitable procedure is having competent colleagues "examine items to judge whether they are adequate for measuring what they are supposed to measure and whether they are a representative sample of the behavior domain under investigation." In accordance with their suggestion, internal consistency was checked by building some redundancy into the instrument. Items on the same topic were rephrased and repeated in both the questionnaire and interview.

Semi-structured Interview. Testing for reliability and validity, and precautions taken to optimize both, were much the same for the structured interviews as for the questionnaire, and have been largely detailed already.

The technique for reliability used by Meyer et al. (1978) was also adapted for use in this study. The subjects were not asked to discuss subtle aspects of their individual attitudes or values -- they were simply treated as informants on day-to-day matters, and the questions were formulated in language that they might use themselves.

Validity for the interviews was enhanced also by asking subjects to check the summary of interview and make any corrections they considered desirable. Also, interviews inevitably contain enough redundancy to provide a valuable check on validity.

Document Analysis. Validity and reliability are no great concern with the document analysis, except in regard to possible researcher bias. With regard to policies, guidelines and procedures, there were only a few sources. The search for relevant documentation was exhaustive in that all respondents, who should know of their existence, were asked to identify relevant materials. Quantitative analysis, based on fairly simple criteria, was used where possible.

Triangulation

The arguments of Jick (1979:603-4) give a rationale for the use of a number of methods for collection of data for the study as multiple measures:

> Capture a more complete, holistic and contextual portrayal of the unit(s) under study. . . . qualitative methods, in particular, can play an especially prominent role by eliciting data and suggesting conclusions to which other methods would be blind. . . . triangulation may be used not only to examine the same phenomenon from multiple perspectives but also to enrich our understanding by allowing for new or deeper dimensions to emerge.

Later (p.608-9) he writes that triangulation, "allows researchers to be more confident of their results," and with the addition of qualitative methods, "the researcher is likely to sustain a profitable closeness to the situation which allows greater sensitivity to the multiple sources of data. Quantitative data and analysis function as the glue that cements the interpretation of multimethod results," while "qualitative data are used as the critical counter-point to quantitative methods."

Data were collected using three methods, and from five sources. The methods were questionnaire, semi structured interview and document analysis. The sources were trustees, senior administrators, principals, teachers, and documents. This multi-method and multi-source approach had two objectives. The first was to corroborate data from one method or source with data from another. The discussion of the various methods and sources has highlighted their deficiencies and it was reasoned that the multi pronged approach would, to some extent, cancel these out. Interview insights supported, clarified, elaborated and explained findings from the questionnaire; while probing revealed reasons behind responses, defined the exact nature of problems and revealed information respondents were unwilling to give in writing. The questionnaire provided much of the data for interviews, made the interviewees much more aware of the problem area, and conveniently collected data that would otherwise have been beyond the reach of the time resources available. Content and face validity were enhanced by converging data from different methods.

The second objective was to add richness and depth to the description of the phenomena being studied.

All approaches should be seen as making their own contribution to piecing together an overall picture, and as offering the opportunity for corroboration of findings. As Turner (1981:243) writes, "The quantitative and the qualitative modes of research ... are not polar opposites and there is no need to pursue one to the exclusion of the other." Greenfield's (1986:3) comment about "an obsessive concern for the methods of inquiry" is also pertinent.

Results of the document analysis were used for corroboration of the other results, and mapping the formal scene in relation to the research problem, and comparing intention with actuality.

Trustworthiness

The study employed a mix of methods and data sources and of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Consequently, some consideration of the naturalistic or qualitative approach to reliability and validity was appropriate.

The qualitative approach derives from a belief that the phenomena to be studied are simply too complex too be translatable into numbers (e.g., see Skrtic,1985). Major exponents of the qualitative approach who have produced a widely accepted rationale are Guba and Lincoln (see Guba,1981; Guba and Lincoln,1982; Lincoln and Guba,1985; Lincoln,1985). They developed the concept of "trustworthiness" as an all-inclusive label to describe the acceptability of the results.

Guba (1981) lists four criteria to replace the traditional concepts of reliability and validity in assessing the trustworthiness of a study. "Credibility" is concerned with the truth value of the study and is the counterpart of internal validity. "Tranferability" concerns generalizability or applicability and is the counterpart of external validity. Reliability is subsumed under the concept of "dependability" and is concerned with consistency. "Confirmability" is the counterpart of objectivity, as it deals with the neutrality of the study and whether it can be replicated. Guba details a number of techniques for enhancing each of these criteria. Some of the techniques carry more conviction than others and any particular study can only hope to employ some of them because of the demands they make upon time and resources. The techniques from Guba's list which have been employed in this study are listed below.

Credibility. To promote the believability of the findings, techniques included: prolonged engagement or a sort of immersion in the particular culture; intensive concentration on those characteristics of the situation that appeared to offer most insights; evaluating interpretations and conclusions by discussion with colleagues; multifaceted approaches (triangulation) in which many data sources, perspectives and methods were used to allow comparison, cross-checking and corroboration; ensuring sufficient of the original data is available for later examination for agreement; checking continuously with respondents, throughout the study, to ensure the researcher's records and interpretations fit their view of reality.

Transferability. The aim was to ensure that the description was so thick, full or dense that others could almost live the situation for themselves and so get sufficient appreciation to make a judgment, on the basis of similarity, as to whether the findings are applicable to other situations they may face.

Dependability. The foregoing criteria on trustworthiness also contribute to an assessment of stability, consistency and accuracy. In addition an "audit trail" exists. There are sufficient records of the original data, and the steps through which the research proceeded, and the way conclusions were reached, for external or independent assessors to determine that the study proceeded according to standards acceptable to the professional. There is sufficient detail for the study to be replicated.

Confirmability. Here too, auditability is the crux. The relationships between the data collected and the study's conclusion are sufficiently supported by documentary and other records, for an interested person to follow the track and decide whether conclusions drawn are reasonable. Objectivity in the study derives from the data.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in conformity with the ethical guidelines of the University of Alberta General Faculties Council and the Department of Educational Administration. Particular attention was given to consent, concealment, confidentiality and anonymity.

Although written consent of respondents was not sought they were: fully briefed on the nature of the study and not misled about purpose and procedures, nor had information withheld from them; advised they could choose not to participate; advised they might personally withdraw or withdraw information provided at any time;

personally approached where possible; asked to approve the accuracy of interview summaries; and, able to prohibit use of any quotation.

The researcher was in a position to identify sources as this was necessary for the methodology. Codes used were revealed to no one else. Data available to others is either in aggregate and compiled across respondent groups, or simply attributed to an anonymous member of a particular class of respondents.

A copy of the final study was made available to the system and a summary of results to any interested respondent.

All respondents were advised of the name of the supervisor of the research and asked to contact him in the event of any concerns or complaints.

SUMMARY

This chapter has outlined the orientation adopted in conducting the research and drawn attention to the nature of the study. The focus of the study was derived from the four major questions which the problem suggested. Selection of the data sources was explained and some comment made about the nature of perceptual data. The development of instruments for use in the study and the attention given to ensuring quality in the data have been described as well as the measures taken to ensure observance of research ethics. The next chapter details how the research design was put into practice in the field and gives an account of the collection of the data.

CHAPTER IV

DATA COLLECTION

In order to establish an audit trail and allow assessment of the trustworthiness of the data, this chapter describes in detail how specific data sources were identified, and the actual collection of the data. Overall characteristics of the data sources and results of the collection are also presented. In selecting and making arrangements with sources some compromises had to be made between the research design and the exigencies of the situation. These are recorded.

IDENTIFYING RESPONDENTS AND DATA SOURCES

Approvals to proceed with data collection were obtained from the Supervisory Committee, the Department of Educational Administration Research Ethics Review Committee, and the Faculty of Education Cooperative Activities Program. The selected school district gave its approval with conditions and nominated a liaison officer.

School District

The school district was selected for the study because it was convenient to the researcher, fell within the constraints of available resources, and was of sufficient size (27,440 students) to constitute a reasonably large school organization. It was a Catholic system, publicly funded, in a large provincial city.

Elementary Schools

Urban elementary schools were chosen for the study because the most relevant research conducted elsewhere has involved these schools and their principals. As indicated in Chapter 3 there are sound reasons for believing the phenomena being investigated may show some variation amongst the levels of schooling. This was also an opinion voiced by a number of respondents.

Organizational Participants

Four categories of organizational participants were selected as those most likely to be knowledgeable about the problem. (Kerlinger, 1974:479) Trustees, senior administrators, principals and teachers have the opportunity to observe whether there is parental influence and how it operates, as well as being personally affected.

Trustees. The questionnaire was mailed to all seven trustees with an accompanying letter indicating the researcher would telephone a week later to discuss its completion and arrange a time for an interview. All seven were contacted and agreed to an interview although three did not receive the original mailing. They were given another copy of the questionnaire at the interview.

Senior Administrators. Eight senior administrators were selected originally on the basis that they were at superintendent level, were members of the executive council for the district, and had a professional teaching background. Included were the three line superiors of the principals (area superintendents). The letter accompanying the mailed questionnaire indicated the researcher would telephone a week later to discuss the research and arrange a time for interview and collection of the questionnaire. Two declined to participate (including an area superintendent) when contacted and a third had completed the questionnaire but did not want to be interviewed at that time. Interview times were arranged with the other five. Another member of the executive council, at the director level, and with a teaching background, expressed interest and was given the questionnaire and agreed to an interview. Two assistant superintendents with extensive school backgrounds were mailed the questionnaire after the approval of their line superintendent was obtained and they agreed to participate when telephoned a week later. Another director was recommended to the researcher because of his interest and studies in the problem area. He was interviewed after being contacted by telephone and a questionnaire left with him for completion.

Principals. Forty six elementary-only schools were identified in the school district. One had a junior secondary special native component but was included as this is quite distinct from the elementary component. The questionnaire was mailed to the forty six principals with the accompanying letter indicating the researcher would telephone after a week in order to discuss its completion. Although a significant proportion had completed and returned the questionnaire before the researcher contacted them, and two had indicated they did not wish to participate, all were telephoned. Forty two agreed to complete the questionnaire and eventually did so. A summary of the principals' comments on their reaction to the study is given in the next section of this chapter.

Seven principals were selected from the forty six, using a random number computer program, and asked for an interview. This met the stipulation of Engelhart (1972:108) that, "The population interviewed should be a population comparable to the questionnaire population sampled; not a biased population comparable to the population of the questionnaire respondents." Six of these agreed to be interviewed. The principal closest on the list to the one who declined to participate was approached and agreed to be interviewed. Six other principals were selected for interview on the bases of wishing to talk to the researcher (2), including schools mentioned by trustees and senior administrators for their parent relations (2), and having representation from special identity schools (2). All six agreed to an interview.

Teachers. The school district stipulated that principals had to be approached for permission to seek the participation of teachers in their schools. The personnel superintendent also suggested that the principal be asked to nominate the teachers. All forty six principals were asked, when telephoned, to nominate three teachers from their staff who might complete the questionnaire, might have some views on the problem, were not in their first year of teaching, and were preferably not the assistant principal. Thirty nine principals agreed to their staff participating. Twenty five gave three names during the telephone call and two called back with the names after consulting staff. Individually addressed letters and the questionnaire were sent to these eighty two teachers (one principal added a fourth name to ensure male representation). Twelve principals asked that the teacher questionnaires be sent to them with some indicating they would ask for volunteers. An individual package was sent for each teacher with the letter addressed to "Dear Teacher" and explaining the reason for not addressing by name. The twelve principals were asked to advise the researcher of the teachers' names. Names of only eighteen of the thirty six teachers were received although nearly all the questionnaires were returned completed. In total, 118 questionnaires were sent to teachers.

Seven random numbers were obtained for a population of 138 (3x46) and used to select teachers for interview. All were contacted by telephone and five of the seven agreed. One preferred not to be interviewed due to her workload, but another teacher from the school, who had completed the questionnaire, agreed. The seventh was from a non-participating school, so the closest participating teacher on the list was asked, and agreed. Two other teachers who had completed questionnaires agreed to an interview. They were selected on the basis of ensuring a good overall geographical spread of interviewees' schools and inclusion of a teacher from a Designated Community School.

The twenty two school based interviewees (principals and teachers) were spread over twenty of the forty-six elementary schools.

Documents

In addition to the thirty eight people interviewed as part of the study, another fourteen were interviewed or contacted. All fifty three were asked whether they could suggest any documents which might be useful for the study. All suggestions were followed-up but they were not numerous. The researcher sought and obtained copies of any documents he expected to find in the school system and was alert to opportunities for obtaining materials when visiting central offices and schools.

DATA COLLECTION

An account is given in this section of the techniques and procedures actually used to gather the data.

Codes

A four digit code number was assigned to each potential respondent who received a questionnaire. The code appeared on each page of the questionnaire and was also used for the interview records. The code allowed for the identification of each individual, the individual's participant group and, where appropriate, the school where the individual worked. The code is known only to the researcher.

In handling the data the following codes identify the respondent groups: T = trustees, A = senior administrators, P = principals, S = teachers. For convenience and confidentiality the convention was adopted of referring to all trustees and teachers as female and to all senior administrators and principals as male. Apart from trustees, this accords with sexual predominance, facilitates flow in writing and protects identity where there is a very small number of respondents.

Mailing

The internal mail system of the school district was available to the researcher. This meant that the only use of public postal facilities was in dealing with trustees. An addressed item could be left at any office or school for delivery. Most return mail was directed through the liaison officer who held them (sealed) for collection by the researcher. This system appeared much more efficient than Canada Post as only two items possibly went astray using it, whereas four (from a very much smaller number) apparently were not delivered by Canada Post.

Personal Contact

An objective in data collection was to establish personal contact with respondents as much as possible. This was achieved with all trustees. With senior administrators, only nine out of twelve were personally available, the other three relaying communication through secretaries. All forty six principals were personally contacted by telephone. Personal contact was made with ten teachers.

Questionnaire

First mailing. The initial questionnaire mailing package, addressed personally (except for thirty six teachers) to all potential respondents, contained the questionnaire, a return-addressed envelope, a copy of the district's letter approving the study and an individually addressed letter. Copies of all items are available in the appendices. The return envelope was included although for trustees, senior administrators and principals the accompanying letter advised that the researcher would be telephoning to arrange a time to collect the completed return. It was included to engender confidence in the security of returns and as a contingency measure. Many respondents took advantage of the return envelope to return the completed questionnaire. This represented a substantial saving in schools visited for the researcher.

The accompanying letter on quality departmental notepaper, and personally addressed by name and title where possible, introduced the researcher, gave brief details of the study, stressed the importance and potential usefulness of the project, made a plea for assistance which stressed the value of the individual contribution, endeavoured to establish rapport, stressed confidentiality, and indicated respondents could ask for a copy of final results. The letter had a recent date and was less than one page. There were different versions for each of the respondent groups.

Follow-up. The return rate following initial mailing, and personal contact was good. Three trustees had it completed for the interview, and another at a subsequent meeting. Of the three who had not received it before interview, one returned it after the first reminder letter and another after the second. The third had indicated reservations about giving the time to completing it at interview and did not respond to the two reminders although the second of these contained another copy of the questionnaire. All ten senior administrators who agreed to complete the questionnare did so without needing to be reminded, but one return was lost in the mail. About half the principals returned the questionnaire before being contacted and most of the remainder returned it soon after. One reminder letter was sent to each of six principals and this proved sufficient to obtain all forty two returns that had been promised.

Response to initial mailing to teachers was also good. About forty reminder letters were dispatched some three weeks later (some addressed through the principal where names were not known) with a good response. As over eighty percent had been returned by the closing date, a second reminder was not sent. One teacher claimed to have returned the questionnaire but it could not be located; one principal said his three teachers assured him they had returned it, but only two could be located from the school.

Receipt. As questionnaires were received the date of receipt was written on them. They were checked to ensure answers were unambiguous. In a small number of cases the respondent had endeavoured to establish a mid-point on the scale (e.g., "3-2"). Where it seemed one answer had been given first and then the other added as an afterthought, the first was taken to be the initial perception and recorded as the response. Otherwise, the researcher alternated designating the first and second number as the response. The first page of each questionnaire was discarded. The final page, Part III, was separately filed for content analysis. Any comments written about questions on the form were transcribed to a record for each question. The completed forms were then given in batches to the programmer/analyst for data entry.

Acknowledgement. In addition to thanking respondents whenever contact was made personally or in writing, the researcher had a general note of appreciation of the help received published in the district's "School Bulletin" which is distributed weekly to all staff.

Interviews

Scheduling. Interviewees were contacted by telephone and an interview time agreed upon. The interviews were conducted over two months from early September to early November. Most were held during office or school business hours, although in the case of trustees four were not in regular employment and one interview was held in the early evening. Most teacher interviews were conducted in their own time, either at lunchtime (two) or immediately after classes finished for the day (six). No appointment was broken though in two cases an initial short interview was postponed to a later date. In a majority of cases only one interview was conducted on any particular day but there were a number of days when two were held and, on one occasion, three.

Setting. Nearly all interviews were conducted at the place of work. Four trustees were interviewed at their homes and one in a restaurant. Teacher interviews were held in their classrooms, sick rooms (2) and a library (1). The remainder were in the interviewee's own office. Distractions were infrequent except for the case of one trustee. The interviewer was always comfortably seated and well placed for taking notes. Invariably the interviewees were very hospitable and they generally offered coffee.

Length. The extremes were twenty minutes (a teacher who could only give that much of her lunch hour) and two and a half hours (a principal who included a tour of the school and a session of before school outside supervision, and a trustee whose hospitality was appreciated). Most interviews were in the fifty minutes to one and a half hours range. Generally, the time was adequate although most supplementary questioning was not pursued as the interviewer felt he was obliged to keep the interview as short as possible. The time pressure was felt most keenly for senior administrators as they possibly had the most to offer but, as a group, had expressed some concern about the amount of time being requested. Teacher interviews tended to be shorter but the time was adequate as they tended to have less to say.

Conduct. The advice of Kerlinger (1974:479) was followed in conducting the interviews. They began with some remarks or inquiries about the school and some personal information on the interviewer's own background and experience as well as remarks about his interest in the problem. A trusting relaxed relationship was sought. The interviewee was told how he or she came to be chosen, given a brief account of how the data would be handled, and asked for some personal background (schooling, professional preparation, career). The preamble was not read as a conversational mode was preferred for rapport. The interviewee was given sufficient time to formulate responses and responses were not interrupted. The interviewer answered questions, provided explanations, probed and sometimes recounted responses in order to elicit further explanation and obtain confirmation .

Recording. The interviewer took notes during the interview. As he has had extensive experience this proved a satisfactory method. The interviews were not taped because "many people feel uncomfortable about having their answers taped and may become inhibited and excessively cautious about what they say." (Ary et al., 1985:344) The only concern was to catch the flavour of the interviewee's speech but through attention to key words and evocative phrases this did not prove difficult. Where necessary, but not frequently, interviewees were asked to repeat or explain a point.

Subjects were invariably advised of the purpose of the note-taking and that they would have the opportunity to correct the draft record. With repeated practice the interviews tended to follow the schedule more closely. The only major variation, apart from time constraints limiting use of supplementary questions, was to begin the interview with questions about personal background as this proved good for establishing rapport, and also related to an emerging theme -- commonality of experience and socialization.

As soon as possible after the interview (generally on the same day) notes were rewritten in full, incorporating an indication of the question that elicited the response, and without abbreviations.

Records of the first few interviews were simply in point form following chronological order. The researcher, in writing-up the interview, then began an initial sorting with comments assigned to their question code where possible in the draft record. Where there was delay in writing-up the notes this does not appear to have affected their quality as the interviewer experienced little difficulty in recall and very few amendments to the record were made by interviewees. The notes were typed and dispatched to the interviewee, generally on the second day after interview.

Confirmation. The letter accompanying the draft interview record despatched to the interviewees invited them to check for accuracy, amend and supplement as they pleased, and to return the record in the enclosed reply envelope. If the record was not returned it was assumed the interviewee was satisfied with it. Details of returns are given in the next section of this chapter.

OVERVIEW OF DATA SOURCES

This section brings together details of the respondents and their background and gives an accounting of responses, as well as details of other information compiled during the data collection process.

Questionnaire Returns

Table 1 shows the number of questionnaires dispatched and the number of returns. Explanatory notes give further details.

Table 1
Questionnaire Returns

Respondent Group	Dispatched	Returned	Percentage
Trustee	7	6	86
Senior Administrator	12	9	75
Principal	46	42	91
Teacher	118	105	89
Total	183	162	89

Explanatory Notes. The trustee who did not return the questionnaire did not receive the initial posting. Although another questionnaire was delivered at interview she indicated at the end of the interview that she thought she had given enough time.

One Senior Administrator posted the return but it was not received. The other two declined to participate. One was "too busy" and the other thought that, as he had been out of the classroom and schools too long, he could not contribute.

The four principals who did not send a return (two actually returned the initial mailing) declined to participate in the study. The reason given by all in telephone contact was overwork and insufficient time, though one added some rather colourful description of the amount of research done at his school.

Questionnaires might have been sent to 138 teachers but seven principals did not want their staff to participate. The reasons given were overwork, the busy time of the year, and problems at the school (building work, split classes). One teacher questionnaire arrived after the cut-off date and two teachers claimed to have returned questionnaires but they could not be located. At least two were received from every school to which they were sent.

A potential source of bias lies in the principal selection of teacher respondents. No indications of such bias were detected. A number of principals indicated they were trying to spread their selections across the school, particularly with regard to grades taught. In some cases the researcher was made aware of the teacher's class assignment and this information tended to confirm the impression of a good spread of teachers amongst grades.

Usable Returns. All returns were usable except for one teacher return which was received after the closing date. Individual questions unanswered by individual respondents were: one for senior administrators out of 378; ten for principals out of 2016; and fifty for teachers out of 4305. Where there were a number of non-responses for a particular question this is discussed in the analysis of the data.

Open Response. Part III of the questionnaire asked for any further comment. Table 2 shows that many took the opportunity.

Table 2
Respondents Commenting: Questionnaire Part III

Respondent Group	Returns	Comments
Trustee	6	4
Senior Administrator	9	4
Principal	42	19
Teacher	105	43
Total	162	70

Most comments were substantial (over one third of a page) and some extended to the reverse side of the sheet provided. Where comments were written on particular questions on the questionnaire form they were collated for reference in the analysis of data for each question.

Return Rate. The return rate, as shown in Table 1, was good. Kerlinger (1964:397) says it should be at least eighty percent and, if less, the characteristics of the non-respondents should be investigated for bias. Hopkins (1976:147) considers seventy percent to be very good. The return rate for teachers was particularly good in view of the fifty percent return rate the district itself had to a recent questionnaire on teacher evaluation -- a topic of great interest to teachers.

There was no cause for concern over non-response bias. The trustee who did not complete the questionnaire was interviewed, as was one of the senior administrators. The reasons given by the other two senior administrators do not indicate bias. The four principals who did not participate were all spoken to by telephone and no reason could be detected other than an unwillingness to give the time at a particularly busy period of the year. The same applied to the seven principals who did not want staff to be involved. Non participation or non-return by teachers did not appear to show any bias. If the full 138 potential respondents had received the questionnaire the return rate would have been over seventy six percent, based on the 105 received. The non participant principals and teachers, and the non-returns from schools, were plotted against geographical areas and against reputation for parent relationships (as described later in this chapter) but nothing significant appeared.

Experience of Respondents. The first two questions of Part II dealt with the experience of the respondents in their particular position, both in the district and in total. Table 3 shows the responses.

Table 3
Years of Experience of Respondents
Frequency

Years **Years**	1-2 **1-5**	3-4 **6-10**	5-6 **11-15**	7-8 **16-20**	9+ **21+**
As Trustee	1	1	3	-	2
In District	1	1	3	-	2
As Sen. Adm.	1	2	4	1	1
Present Position	1	1	2	1	4
As Principal	11	7	12	8	4
Present Position	16	9	9	2	6
As Teacher	4	30	31	20	19
In District	10	30	33	19	12

Sex of Respondents. The sex of respondents is shown in Table 4, insofar as sex could be ascertained from names. For teachers, only eighty four names were known.

Table 4
Sex of Respondents

Respondent Group	Number in Group		Respondents		N
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Trustee	4	3	4	3	7
Senior Administrator	11	1	8	1	12
Principal	38	4	38	4	42
Teacher	-	-	17	67	104

Foot Note: Sex of only 84 teachers could be ascertained from names.

Interviews

Return of Interview Record. Table 5 shows the number of interviewees who responded to the invitation to return the interview record. The return of the record was not regarded as essential as it was assumed that non-return indicated the respondent was satisfied with the record. Grounds for this assumption lie in the belief that responsible subjects, as they all were, would want to have any significant error corrected, and in the evidence of accurate recording that is to be found in those returned.

Table 5
Number of Interview Records Returned

Respondent Group	Number Interviewed	Records Returned
Trustee	7	5
Senior Administrator	9	8
Principal	13	11
Teacher	9	5
Total	38	29

No significant changes were made on any of the returned drafts -- only an occasional minor correction. A number wrote notes of best wishes on the returned draft as well as an indication they were satisfied with the record. For example, a principal wrote, "I feel quite comfortable with your summary of the conversation we had." A trustee, of twenty four years standing, wrote, "You did very well in recording my opinions -- you have a great memory." The one exception was the interviewee who did not return the record but instead wrote a note indicating that the interview record was not to be used because, apparently, it was too accurate. During the interview the researcher had been called upon a number of times to give assurances of confidentiality and that he was not "from the board." While information from this interview may be included as a component in assessing the strength of principals' opinion, no specific reference is made to the interview in the study.

Trustee Profile. The term of office for a trustee is three years. Of the seven trustees, two had served one term, three had served two terms, one had served four terms and one eight terms. Five were campaigning for re-election and were re-elected during the study. Two were homemakers, one a public executive, two retired (one a former businessman and the other deputy superintendent of the district for thirty two years), one a psychologist/educationist, and one in the commercial world had formerly been a parliamentarian. All stressed that the board handled all matters objectively in the interests of the district as a whole. However, other respondents pointed out that: two had French connections and two Ukrainian, while one had a Polish wife and another was Irish Catholic. Four were male and three female.

Senior Administrator Profile. Of the nine senior administrators interviewed, five were superintendents (including two area superintendents), two were directors and two were assistant superintendents. All had very considerable experience as a senior administrator in the district and in their existing position, except for one very experienced principal who was in the second year of an exchange to central office. All had been employees of the district for many years and, in fact, most had spent most of their working life with the district, and a number had attended district schools as students. Most had also done professional preparation ranging from bachelor to doctoral. at the local university. While some had attended other universities and some had work experience outside the district, these did not constitute significant proportions. One senior administrator was female.

Principal Profile. Thirteen principals were interviewed. The following indicate their representative nature.

1. Three were in their first year as principal of their present school, while three had been in the position for ten years or more. Between these extremes, two were in their second year, two in their third year, and one each in their fourth, fifth and sixth years. The average was four years.

2. Two were in their first year as a principal while eight had more than ten years in the role with five of those being seventeen years or more. The average was eleven

years.

3. Nine of the principals had been employed by the district for over twenty years with two of these exceeding thirty years. The lowest experience with the district was twelve years and the average was over twenty years.

4. Three had been students in the district's schools while eight attended school in rural areas of the province and two were from an adjacent province.

5. Eleven had been students at the city's university and five had experience as students of other universities. Nearly all had pursued studies beyond the undergraduate level.

6. Enrolment in the principals' schools ranged from two with just over five hundred down to five with less than two hundred pupils.

7. Two of the principals' schools were French immersion (one fully) and two had bilingual Ukrainian components. One was a designated community school and one had a native junior secondary component. Two of the principals indicated the socio-economic status of their clientele had declined while one indicated the area was very high in this respect. Two mentioned the high proportion of first generation Canadians ("little U.N.," and forty percent non-English speaking).

8. One principal interviewed was female.

9. Eleven of the principals had a parent advisory committee.

10. Ten principals provided school handbooks, nearly all called "Parent-Student Handbook."

Teacher Profile. Nine teachers were interviewed. They had the following characteristics.

1. Three were in their second year at their school while three were in their ninth year or more. The average was five years.

2. Seven had taught for over ten years, with twenty four years for the most experienced and an average of over twelve years. The least experienced were six years

and four years.

3. Four of the teachers had been students of the school district and four attended school in rural areas of the province, although one of these had come to the city for high school.

4. All the teachers had been students at the city's university with only two having attended universities outside the province.

5. Three of the teachers had some teaching experience outside the district.

6. Four of the teachers had Grade 1 classes while the others taught Grades 2, 4, 5 and 6, and a special education class. Two had combined grades and one taught French to other grades.

7. The sizes of the schools where the teachers taught covered the full range for elementary schools in the district, and there was one from a French immersion school and one from a designated community school. The schools were spread over the city and only two were from schools where the principal was also interviewed.

8. Two of the teachers had fathers employed at higher levels in the district.

9. Two of the nine were male.

Non-participation. Efforts were made to ensure there was no bias resulting from those approached declining to be interviewed. Only one teacher declined because of workload (although she would have agreed if pressed) and another teacher from the same school agreed. One principal declined because of workload but suggested an approach some time later. This was not followed-up as another principal who was interviewed had been principal of the same school for a number of years. The most serious non-participation was from senior administrators with three declining, two because of workload (one indicated a later approach could be made) and one because he thought he would not be able to contribute. All reasons were reported through secretaries and there was no personal contact. One was an area superintendent (direct line supervisor of principals) and one was in a key personnel position and may have had a good overview of parental influence in that area. However, the researcher is not aware of any indication of a bias in the data because of a failure to interview the three.

Additional Interviews. In accordance with the qualitative approach the researcher immersed himself in the problem and some fourteen other people were interviewed for information on the subject and help they could give with the study. Three were senior officers of the provincial education department; three were candidates at the current trustee elections and two had been trustees; another was the senior administrator in the trustees' association; four were central office personnel in the district; two were very experienced former superintendents; one was president of the districts teachers' local. The president of the district's administrators' association was interviewed by telephone.

Documentation

In addition to making every effort to obtain available documents in the school district and its schools, the researcher was provided with documents and references by the provincial Catholic schools trustees' association, the provincial federation of home and school associations, and the provincial teachers' association. A collection of candidates' election materials was also made.

Schools and Respondents

Characteristics of Respondents' Schools. Table 6 gives details of the forty six schools whose principals were approached to participate in the study. Number of pupils enrolled (within a range of fifty) and teacher allotments (to the nearest whole number) are shown. The table indicates whether the principal completed the questionnaire, how many teachers completed it, whether a principal or teacher was interviewed (and how they were selected), and whether the school has a parent advisory group. Any feature distinguishing the school from the regular EC-6 pattern is noted.

Table 6
Schools and Respondents

Students	Teachers	Principal Questionnaire	Teacher Questionnaire	Principal Interview	Teacher Interview	PAC	Features
80-100	5	1	3	-	-	1	1-6
	6	1	2	-	-	1	1-6
101-150	8	1	-	-	-	1	-
	7	1	3	-	-	1	-
	7	1	3	-	1(R)	1	-
	7	1	3	-	-	1	-
	6	1	-	-	-	1	-
	9	1	3	-	-	1	-
	8	1	3	1(S)	-	1	-
	9	1	2	-	-	1	-
151-200	10	1	3	1(S)	-	1	-
	8	1	2	1(R)	-	1	I.F.
	11	1	3	-	-	1	Com.
	10	1	2	-	1(R)	1	-
	10	1	2	-	-	1	EC-5
	10	1	3	1(S)	-	1	B.U.
	11	1	3	1(R)	-	1	-
	8	1	3	-	-	1	-
	7	1	3	-	-	1	I.F.
201-250	10	1	2	-	-	1	-
	11	1	2	-	-	1	-
	12	1	3	1(R)	-	-	-
	13	1	2	-	1(R)	1	-
	14	1	3	1(R)	-	1	J.H.
	11	1	3	-	-	1	I.F.
251-300	13	1	3	-	1(S)	1	-
	13	1	3	-	-	1	-
	12	1	2	-	-	1	-
	17	1	2	1(R)	-	-	-
	13	1	3	-	1(R)	1	-
	12	1	3	-	1(R)	1	-
301-350	16	1	-	-	-	1	-
	14	1	2	1(S)	-	1	-
	14	1	3	-	1(R)	1	-
	16	1	2	1(S)	1(S)	1	Com
	15	1	3	-	-	1	-
	17	1	3	-	-	1	B.U.
351-400	19	1	3	-	-	1	-
	18	1	3	1(S)	-	1	-
401-450	21	1	3	-	-	1	-
501+	24	1	3	1(S)	1(R)	1	I.F.
	23	1	3	1(R)	-	1	B.U.

Key: (S) - selected
J.H. - Junior high component.
Com - Designated Community School
I.F. - Immersion French
B.U. - Bilingual Ukrainian
? - not known
(R) - random
1-6 - Grades 1 to 6 only

Geographic Location. Some reference was made by some interviewees to the link between socio-economic status of the neighbourhood and the amount of parental influence in schools. In particular, two mentioned the North East-South West axis which has been identified as coinciding with affluence. A check of principals who did not participate and those whose staff were not involved indicated no bias in the location of their schools. They were distributed almost evenly in the reputedly higher and lower socio-economic areas. An interesting phenomenon was that all schools on the North West-South East axis participated fully. The NE-SW axis notion is considerably confused by questions of whether it applies to the older or expanded city, by developments as areas degenerate or renew, and by social engineering.

Socio-economic Status. The forty two principals and 104 teachers who completed the questionnaire, rated the socio-economic status of their school community as follows (the first figure in each pair is the percentage of principals and the second is the percentage of teachers): very high, 10, 7; high, 17, 18; average, 45, 64; low, 26, 7; very low, 2, 4. The range of responses gives confidence that there was no socio-economic bias introduced through the sample of schools from which questionnaires were returned.

Reputation for Parent Relationship. At the suggestion of the Supervisory Committee an effort was made to identify schools which were perceived as having very good relationships with parents and those having poor relationships. Trustees, senior administrators and other appropriate interviewees were asked which schools had a very good relationship and which had poor relationships. This was a reputational assessment. The procedure proved inadequate.

It was obvious there was not much common ground as to definition of a good or poor relationship. Some obviously thought in terms of the parents' relationship with the school system as they drew upon examples of school closure, amalgamation or contraction to illustrate poor relationships. Others simply referred to parent involvement. One senior administrator said he could name some which had had poor relationships but they all had new principals. Another said he could name good or poor relationships by naming principals, regardless of the school to which they were posted. Another cited the case of a strong principal transferring to a school where parents had been very influential, and making needed changes against much initial opposition. The very experienced principal of one school which had been mentioned as having parent problems, gave an account of the first two years in the job when he experienced problems because he adopted a different approach from his predecessor. However, the problems had settled this year and there had not been any complaints.

There were indications that trustees and senior administrators might be adopting different criteria in assessing parent relations. Trustee nominations for schools with good relations were predominantly those with bilingual components and it might be surmised, in view of other evidence about greater parent involvement and influence in these schools, that the trustees were basing their judgment on the force of the representations they received from these schools and their parents. In addition, the trustees seemed to base their opinion only on the French or Ukrainian components of these schools where the school had both English and non-English components. Some indications suggest parent relationships might differ significantly according to the students' program. With senior administrators the number of complaints or problems led to their judgments, as well as factors such as parent involvement in the school.

A third problem in establishing a reputational list of schools with good or poor relations with parents arose from reluctance to name those with poor relationships. Trustees, in particular, regarded this as too sensitive a matter for them to comment upon, despite all the assurances of confidentiality.

As shown in Table 7, twenty seven schools were named in total as having either good or poor parent relationships. Twenty were named as good, while seven were named as poor -- no school was named as both. Three schools were named by five different informants as having good relationships, three were named by four informants, four were named by three informants, four were named by two informants and six were nominated by just one informant. For poor relationships, three schools received mention by two different informants and four schools were nominated by single informants.

Table 7
Number of Schools Nominated as Having
Good or Poor Parent Relationships

Frequency	Good	Poor
1	6	4
2	4	3
3	4	-
4	3	-
5	3	-

Table 8 shows school type and reputational parent relationship and illustrates how "special identity" is associated with informants' assessment of the school's parent relationships.

Table 8
School Type and Reputational Parent Relationship

Frequency of Nomination	Immersion French		Bilingual Ukrainian		Community School		Regular Elementary	
	Good	Poor	Good	Poor	Good	Poor	Good	Poor
1	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	4
2	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	3
3	2	-	1	-	-	-	1	-
4	2	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
5	-	-	1	-	-	-	2	-

The data in this table might suggest that in view of their small number (seven out of the forty six schools) the bilingual French and Ukrainian Schools have, on the whole, better parent relations. But two regular elementary schools received most nominations (five). Some bilingual schools received no nominations. However, all the nominations for poor relationships were regular elementary schools. Interestingly, both community schools in the group of forty six, received two nominations.

The location in the city of schools rated good and poor for parent relationships does not reveal any pattern except, perhaps, for the predominance of the good relationship schools in the north, where the three with five nominations for good relationships are all located. Of those with four nominations, two are in the south and one in the north. For those with three nominations, one is north-east, one is central. Two south-west schools were nominated twice, as were one from the central north and one from the west.

The schools nominated for poor relationships seem well distributed over the city though three were from the north-west.

None of the four schools which elected not to participate at all in the study was mentioned as having either good or poor parent relationships. Two of the schools where the principal completed the questionnaire but did not want it sent to staff were nominated as having poor relationships (one twice). In the overall return of questionnaires there did not appear to be any differences amongst schools with good, poor, or no ratings.

Principals' Comments

Contacting Principals. Telephoning principals commenced a week after distribution of the questionnaire and it took well over a week before all were contacted. All were polite and courteous and generally they were friendly and helpful, with most indicating a willingness to assist, despite frequent reference to the busy time. In addition to being thanked, requested to return the completed questionnaire (if they had not already done so), asked for an interview if on the list, and asked for teacher names, they were asked to comment on the questionnaire.

Attitudes towards Participation. Most principals were quite willing to cooperate. Some expressed considerable enthusiasm, such as the principal who speculated whether he might have won a bottle of wine as a prize for having his questionnaire in first. At the other end of the scale were those who could not participate or had put the request at the "bottom of the stack," would do it when they found time, or, "If I felt like it." The main reservations expressed related to time constraints, the busy time at the beginning of the school year, the number of similar requests received at that time, and particular problems being experienced at the school (split-classes, construction work) or personally (two had periods of absence).

Most principals expressed no reservations in assisting with the study and those showing enthusiasm were as numerous as those expressing reservations. The four who decided not to participate personally gave as reasons the heavy demands upon them and staff at the time. One also wrote a fairly lengthy note claiming his school had been "researched to death" and the staff were cynical about lack of outcomes from such research. He pointed out that there was very little parent input to his school, mainly because its clientele were predominantly new Canadians.

The three principals who agreed to complete the questionnaire themselves, but declined to have their teachers involved, gave reasons which were all concerned with work overload and particular problems at the school, lack of time, competing demands, the busy beginning of the year, and excessive research requests. Problems mentioned for individual schools included: small number of full-time teachers on staff, split-grades, ambitious projects underway, construction work, staffing problems. In general they indicated a desire, as one principal put it, "to deflect as much as possible" from teachers in view of the demands being made upon them and the difficulties they were experiencing.

Views on Questionnaire and the Study. Over half the principals had little to say about the questionnaire or study with 'not really' being a frequent response to the request for comment. Most frequent comments concerned reasons for not participating in the study, for not having looked at the questionnaire, or for not having already returned it (even though they had not been asked to do so). The reasons given were: being "hit a lot" and "saturated" with such requests; "a hell of a pile of forms" to fill out at this time; the difficulty of finding time at this busy period of the school year; particular problems of the individual school; the "tremendous workload" and lack of time; staff antipathy; and the desire to protect staff from unnecessary demands.

Where the principals did comment on the questionnaire and study there were no adverse comments. Two praised the care and attention that had gone into the initial approach package and indicated this engendered a cooperative disposition. Six said it was an area in which they were very interested, or "dear to my heart" as one said, and made known their opinion that it was a "worthwhile project." Other comments were that the questionnaire was "straightforward and comprehensive," "covering the waterfront."

Four principals commented they found the questionnaire a "bit sticky," "difficult at times," or caused "some difficulty getting to the point," or some questions were "a little awkward." One pointed out that while the questions were quite different, the researcher's "perspective" meant that the answers given were all similar.

A few took the opportunity to comment on their own school experience of parental influence or the subject generally. Two said they had good parent advisory committees and one claimed to achieve a lot with parents, while another said there was little parent communication in his area because there were so many "foreigners." One indicated some parents could be unreasonable in wanting things for their own children regardless of wider implications. Another said it was "nice to have more parental involvement," but unfortunately some found it "easier to go the the board or superintendent rather than take time off work to come to the school."

One principal expressed doubt as to whether teachers would be able to contribute much to the study since they would not be aware of parental influence and how it operated, as it was outside their experience.

SUMMARY

This chapter has been concerned with explaining how and why the sources of data were selected for the study. It has described the processes of collecting the data and then reviewed the collection before concluding with some description of data arising from the collection processes themselves.

The next chapter describes the procedures adopted for the analysis of the data and some of the initial impressions gained, preliminary to a detailed analysis in the following four chapters.

CHAPTER V

DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter explains the approaches taken to the analysis of the data for each of the three data sources -- questionnaire, interview and documents. This is followed by a consideration of what emerges from the data and experience with regard to the instruments used and some assessment of their value, particularly the questionnaire. Attention is given to whether the data confirm the importance of parental influence as a topic of investigation. Finally, an analytical framework, based on the focus of the study described in Chapter 4, is developed to encompass the data and provide a guide for the detailed discussion of findings in the following four chapters.

TREATMENT OF THE DATA

The analysis of the data was concerned first with establishing the perceived existence of the phenomenon of parental influence and associated phenomena which establish its importance. Its impact on the principal's work behavior and the importance of the principal for the school are the second focus for analysis. The role that the principal's superordinates play in facilitating the responsiveness of principals to parents was another major interest, as were the means by which parents exert influence.

As this was a pilot study, the objective was to explore the data so as to arrive at a description of the phenomena which would lead to some propositions about parental influence and how and why it affects principal work behavior. In exploring the data a range of techniques was used across the quantitative-qualitative dimension because any approach that might yield insights is justified in the initial mapping of a problem area.

Not only does this approach allow for a fuller picture, but it also enables use of the "structured corroboration" technique described by McCutcheon (1972:12) whereby "many facts are shown to support one another in agreement about a particular conclusion. A fabric of interrelated facts, anecdotes, quotes and other bits of information is woven."

Questionnaire Data

Statistical Analysis. As the study was generally not based upon randomly selected samples, makes no claim to being representative, and examined only one school district, the use of inferential statistics was not appropriate. Frequencies, percentage frequency distributions, means and limited reference to rankings were sufficient for analysis of the numerical data.

The questionnaire responses were checked upon receipt and then entered for computer processing using the SPSSx program (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Printouts were obtained of all responses, grouped in numerical order of assigned code numbers according to the organizational participant category, and of all the statistical operations the package performs on the data. Perusal of the additional data confirmed the desirability of limiting the analysis to simple descriptive statistics.

Descriptive. The ideas of Tukey (1980:24) were applied where appropriate since "the picture examining eye is the best finder we have of the totally unexpected." However, the graphs and diagrams that were made are not generally reported as the numbers, percentages and means can be readily grasped in a glance and graphical representations could be misleading to those not thoroughly familiar with the data collection. For example, the direction of the scale in the main part of the questionnaire, with "1" being "very important", meant that bar charts and graphs may easily have misled, without repeated explanation that "small" indicated "more" rather than the conventional opposite. Also, the small range between highest and lowest mean scores

(1.53) meant that graphical representation would have had to be enlarged considerably, leading to a possibility of misinterpretation through exaggeration of differences. The small sample size for trustees and senior administrators was an added complication.

Open Response. There were three categories of open response data from the questionnaire. First, respondents sometimes wrote comments about particular questions, or qualifications to their answers, alongside the question on the form. These comments were collated for each question and considered in the detailed analysis of results when the particular question was being examined.

Second, a few questions asked respondents to write answers. Principals and senior administrators were asked to name any parent bodies they had to advise them and principals were asked to give examples of matters on which they had differed with parents. Answers to the former were simply tabulated for frequency and by name for use in the appropriate section of later analysis. Matters on which principals had experienced differences with parents were classified according to subject area and used to illustrate, for example, the analysis of whether parental influence varies across different aspects of school operations.

The major source of open responses was Part III which asked the respondents for any additional comments they wished to make about the subject of the questionnaire. These comments were sorted and grouped in some fifteen categories according to their reference to particular aspects of the problem area or individual questions from the questionnaire. The latter were collated with other information for use in the detailed analysis of results from each question. The former were eventually matched with the categories developed from the interviews and, where appropriate, combined with them, or retained as separate categories.

Interview Data

The prior familiarity with the questionnaire of most interviewees, the specific questions asked, and the time constraints in interviews are reflected in the data obtained and give it a considerable degree of structure. Yet, because of the open-ended nature of the questions and the amount of free response, it still resembles the Schatzman and Strauss (1973:108) description: "Qualitative data are exceedingly complex and not readily convertible into standard measurable units of objects seen and heard; they vary in level of abstraction, in frequency of occurrence, in relevance to the central questions." Consequently, in analyzing the data, the advice of Bogdan and Biklen (1982:145) was followed in "working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others." The approach involved grouping comments according to subject matter and then working on the aggregated data to extract common views and recurrent themes. Synopses of all interviewees' responses on a particular question of interest were prepared but care was taken to be alert for an unusual insight, or illuminating quotation, and to guard against loss of descriptive quality.

Procedure. Of the thirty eight records of interviews available from the major study, seventy six percent were returned as confirmed by the interviewees, and it was assumed the remainder were satisfied with the record. There were over 200 typed pages of information derived from the interviewees.

The first data extracted concerned the background of the interviewees, details of their work and their school context. These data formed the basis for the description of the respondents in the previous chapter.

The first two questions on the schedule (G1 and G2) were concerned with the questionnaire itself. Those relating to the whole questionnaire (G1) form part of the discussion of this instrument later in this chapter, while those concerning individual questions (G2) are used in the detailed analysis of questions in the following chapters.

The remainder of the data was first sorted according to relevance to the question which was asked. That is, all comments about a matter raised by a question or follow-up were grouped. Where comments could not be included in these groupings, and still appeared to have relevance to the problem, additional categories were created. Comments which had relevance to more than one category were included in both. No comment by an interviewee was discarded until the end of the process and this meant those few which were eventually discarded had been repeatedly considered.

Next, the comments in a category were examined and all the points made by interviewees were listed. Recurrence of the same point was quantified without discarding original expressions. A narrative record of the category, including details of how the question was asked and received, was then written, based largely upon quotations from the original interview records. At this stage, comments from Part III of the questionnaire were joined with the interview data through inclusion in existing categories or by making additional ones. The 150 typed pages of narrative constituted a source document for the thesis. They contain reference to all pertinent comments made by interviewees.

Framework. Through the categorization of interview and open-response data, and the items forming the questionnaire, frameworks were developed for further analysis and discussion of results, as described later in this chapter. When a point was being considered for analysis, the researcher returned repeatedly to the source document for ideas, to corroborate, to embellish, and to ensure exceptions received full consideration.

Audit Trail. The researcher using qualitative data has to take care to ensure an audit trail exists whereby anyone can follow the steps by which a conclusion was reached, right back to the original data. In this case a handwritten copy of all aggregated comments used to form the basis for a category narrative is available. The respondent code identifies the source of each comment in the interview records. In using quotations from the interview record for description of the results there is an occasional change of grammatical person to improve the presentation.

Documents

Limitations. Documentation did not assume the status expected in the study because little was available. Two possibly pertinent sources were not available as the request for access was denied. The researcher had sought to examine area superintendents' records of their assessment of, and goal setting with, principals, in order to do an analysis similar to Kelsey (1983) but this was denied on the basis that the information available would not be relevant, particularly as the principal evaluation scheme had recently been changed. Access to the records of 'conference' meeting between the board and executive council was also denied so there was no opportunity to ascertain how often parent matters were raised, but the lack of reference by interviewees might indicate they are not an important vehicle for parental influence. The list of documents in Appendix D and those in the bibliography are considerable but not many are amenable to the sort of analysis which Stone (1964) advocated in order to determine the relative extent to which specified references, attitudes or themes permeate.

Content Analysis. Some classes of documents were perused with a view to "the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content," following the four requisites specified by Berelson (1954:489). These included: the year's editions of the "Administrators' Bulletin" from area superintendents to principals; records of the "School Bulletin" (weekly from central office to all staff) for the previous two years; campaign literature and newspaper reports from the current trustee elections; "handouts" available from the district; handbooks from individual schools; the district's "Policy Guideline and Administrative Procedure Handbook"; and the provincial teachers' association "Members Handbook." This did not prove a major exercise as content relevant to parental influence was sparse and almost invariably couched in general, aspirational terms.

Use of Documents. Information pertinent to the problem was recorded on cards for all documents read, including the limited content analyses described above. Where there was something pertinent from the documents, reference was made in the discussion of results from other sources.

INSTRUMENTATION

Two instruments were developed for use in this study. From experience in using the instruments, and from the various results obtained, some assessment of the value of the questionnaire and interview schedule can be made.

The Questionnaire as an Instrument

Respondent Endorsement. If both the pilot testing and administration during the study are included, over 200 highly educated people with extensive knowledge of education and schools examined the questionnaire and had the opportunity to comment on the instrument. There was remarkably little criticism of the instrument or its suitability for its purpose. In fact, only two responses could be classed as critical, and there were virtually no suggestions for inclusion of additional items that might reveal other facets of parental influence.

A respondent during pilot testing claimed that in the existing context of schooling, all the questions asked were of the "motherhood" type. Presumably he meant that respondents had little choice but to rate parental influence as invariably important for all the questions. As a major purpose of the instrument was to determine whether parental influence is, in fact, a significant determinant of what happens in schools, this criticism could be construed as endorsement of the instrument in that it reveals a pervasive belief or perceptual set.

A teacher wrote critically on the questionnaire: "In the world there are many variables that make this questionnaire slanted to whatever is wanted (by the questioner). Socio-economics and downright power tripping are not taken into account. There is much to be desired in this survey if it is to be fair." While it is not clear what the complaint is, it seems that she might have assumed the researcher was taking the view that parental influence was good and seeking endorsement for that view through the questionnaire, whereas her perception that it is closely related to socio-economic status and self-indulgence might cast different light. Once again, this hardly constitutes a valid criticism since the questionnaire is concerned with establishing the existence of the phenomena, not with making value judgments.

Nature of the data derived. The questionnaire aimed principally to ascertain whether the four categories of organizational participants perceived the existence of parental influence, the ways they perceived it operating, and whether they perceived it as a control on principal behavior. The results are conclusive. As shown in the table of means (Appendix E), the aggregated weight of responses with regard to every pertinent question tended towards a perception of parental influence being important, except for Question 27 where the mean for all respondents, at 2.85, exceeded 2.5, the mid-point between "important" and "unimportant". That is, the aggregated view for this question was that parents' expectations did not play an important part in teacher selection, though a good proportion of respondents thought they did. For just over half of the thirty items in Part I the mean score for all respondents ranged from 1.98 to 1.32 indicating a very considerable weight of perception towards parental influence being important in the nominated areas. The very small use of the "very unimportant" response would seem to indicate respondents were not prepared to eliminate any of the questionnaire items as having no significance.

For thirteen items in Part I the overall mean score was between 2.01 and 2.49. The weight of opinion at a mean of 2.49 just favoured principals giving importance to informing superiors of problems they were having with parents. Similarly, an overall mean of 2.43 seems to indicate principals are perceived as not attaching much importance (though they are seen by most as regarding it as important) to promoting parent support for provincial policies. With an overall mean of 2.41, the general perception is that information from parents is of marginal importance in the informal evaluation of teachers.

At the other extreme, an overall mean of 1.32 indicates most of the respondents to question 23 see principals as trying very hard to resolve parent problems at their own level and prevent their going to higher levels. Similarly, at 1.33, gaining and maintaining parent support is perceived to be very important in the district. This seems to corroborate an overall perception for question 6 (mean of 1.49) that the district places importance on schools being responsive to parents.

Other than indicating the tendency in perceptions towards important or unimportant, consideration of the means for all respondents does not provide much information. The general impression is that parental influence can be important in all the aspects measured by the questionnaire as, even for those items where the overall mean was near to the theoretical mid-point of 2.5, a substantial body of opinion saw parents as being important and there was virtually no use of "4" as a response. "Very unimportant" was given as a response on 106 occasions out of a possible 4860, and fifty one of these concerned three questions.

Three of the thirty questions in Part I, which was answered by all respondents, cannot be construed as indicating anything directly about parental influence. Question 6 is concerned with perception of principal autonomy, questions 25 and 26 deal with principals promoting district and provincial policies with parents. These three questions were included to investigate the problem from different aspects. In addition, Question 24, for example, is open to two constructions: principals regard it as important to tell their superiors of parent problems they experience because parents are important; or, principals try to keep knowledge of parent problems from superiors because, to pass the information on, might damage their own standing.

This brief discussion has highlighted some of the problems in interpreting the questionnaire data. While the results overall can be interpreted as demonstrating that organizational participants see parental influence as an important determinant of what happens in schools, the questionnaire should not be seen as a scale of parental influence and was not constructed for that purpose. Rather, the items were selected for their potential for throwing light on various aspects of parental influence. As such, the data for each question need to be considered individually with reference, in most cases, to the interviews for assistance in placing a construction on the data.

Perceived strengths. There were no generally adverse comments about the instrument itself except for the accusation of bias previously mentioned. This was also true of the pilot testing where the researcher specifically asked for criticism. Interview comments on the questionnaire were sparse, partly because of time elapsed between questionnaire completion and interview, and because of an inability to distinguish it in recall from other requests for information. General comments made were favourable but only two went beyond "interesting" to "very good". Six took the opportunity to comment upon the importance of the topic. Of particular interest were two comments from senior adminstrators that it was "comprehensive" and would make a good self-evaluation exercise for principals. This accords with the absence of suggestions for improvement or expansion of the content and might indicate the problem is adequately covered.

Perceived problems. While no interviewee or questionnaire respondent pointed to any major weakness in the questionnaire, a number did point to problems they had in answering. There were ten comments favouring a mid-point on the scale or a "maybe" as one principal expressed it. Another principal wrote: " There is a large gap between important and unimportant. I would prefer the use of little or no importance." A teacher would have liked a "minimally important" rating, and another wanted "unknown". A teacher protested about having to "either agree or disagree," while another thought the ratings made no allowance for "giving weight to parent opinion, yet, strictly speaking, not taking their opinions into account."

The decision not to have a mid-point was taken after consultation with the advisory committee and was intended to force respondents to take a position because with such complex phenomena there can be a tendency to "opt out" by taking a neutral position. This is illustrated by comments of two senior administrators: "While there was a general answer, you could always think of the exception."; "Some were grey, but you had to go with the best answer." And a principal said, "There were a lot of judgments and I'm not sure if they were valid." Whether a mid-point should be included is open to debate with no conclusive argument either way.

A similar problem was expressed by six or seven interviewees and respondents who had difficulty in generalizing because the situation differed from school to school, or "would vary with the personalities of the individuals involved", or "because one meets so many different types of people who are the parent community." This is a problem with many questionnaires and cannot be avoided.

An insightful point made by both a principal and a senior administrator was that some questions were "relevant only in a negative sense." An example is that there is no soliciting of parent views on a principal seeking a favourable transfer but if there was a record of past problems this could be a factor.

Further development. With this study as a basis, the questionnaire could be further developed. By removing those items in Part I which do not call for a response regarding the importance of parental influence, and perhaps replacing them with others, and by removing any ambiguity in questions as to the direction of the influence (for example, question 24 could be broken into two more specific questions) it appears that a scale of parental influence could be constructed. This could be useful for comparisons between groups of respondents or between school jurisdictions or, with further changes, between schools. Some consideration of the scale would be needed in order to decide whether a mid-point should be included and whether the scale has sufficient steps in order to discriminate sufficiently, especially in light of respondents' unwillingness to use one extreme. Grassie's (1979a) scale, which was used in Part II, Principals, illustrates how a more precise gradation of influence can be included in a scale but it also illustrates the sacrifice of simplicity.

Part II of the questionnaire has not been discussed here because it was designed to gather personal information about the respondent and to tap perceptions from the perspective of the respondent's group. There are many possibilities for expansion of this section to allow for correlational studies of perception of parental influence and personal characteristics, as well as to further explore the nature of the group's perception of parental influence.

The Interview Schedule as an Instrument

The interview schedule was adequate as a means for getting subjects to talk about the problem area. Several adaptations were made to it as interviews progressed in order to explore the problem area better, to improve individual questions and to make for greater procedural efficiency.

Personal details. Questions about personal background and work experience were added at the beginning because getting the interviewee to talk about him or herself proved effective in establishing rapport and because the information elicited may be of value. Socialization is an important control mechanism. A substantial proportion of staff have had a lifetime's employment with the district, have attended a local institution for professional preparation, and, as likely as not, attended the district's schools as students. Their socialization could well be a dominant control factor shaping their actions, if not their words.

Follow-up on clues. The semi-structured interview proved suitable for follow-up on possibly relevant clues that emerged in answers, in addition to matters specifically raised by the questions. Thus the interviewer became aware of a move from within parent advisory committees to organize on a district basis. This was then added as a supplementary question and proved fruitful for the insights it gave into trustee and senior administrator attitudes about the proper way for parents to make their views known -- at the school level through the principal, and through elections or forums organized by the board at district level.

Individual questions. Some questions were adapted as experience demonstrated better ways of getting the subject to grasp the point of the question or that subjects needed some help in order to focus their thoughts. For example, the question on whether parents allow schools broad boundaries within which to exercise discretion came to be generally introduced by the "zone of tolerance" metaphor, and the question on whether parents were more influential in some areas of school operations than others was followed up with specific reference to staffing as an example. These adaptations for each question are described in the analysis of each.

Efficiency. With increased experience of the interview the researcher became more adept at eliciting responses to the question at hand. Often this meant saying, as the interviewee diverged, "That will come up later," and making a mental note to refer the subject to this reference when the question was asked . The danger that had to be guarded against was that of forestalling the interviewee from saying something of value that might not be said later and thus introducing bias into the interview. Another improvement was to reorganize the record of interview during the writing-up operation so that it followed the sequence of questions whilst still retaining extraneous material. The writing-up phase became an initial sorting of responses, facilitating later analysis.

Time. Time proved to be the major problem with the interview schedule. While the major questions could be covered in an hour to an hour and a half, there was often insufficient time for supplementary questions and probing. Two and a half hours might be needed to cover the schedule fully except for teachers, who generally had much less to say, and those interviewees who express themselves concisely as a matter of habit.

Whether a researcher is justified in asking for so much time, and whether potential subjects would be willing to give it, are matters that would have to guide any future use of the schedule. From the findings of this study the schedule could be adapted and shortened to focus more specifically on what appear to be the most fruitful aspects or, alternatively, the entire schedule could be covered through additional interviews.

IMPORTANCE OF PARENTAL INFLUENCE

As the researcher became more involved with both the subject district and the literature, it became apparent that the general problem -- the influence of parents on schools -- was a matter of considerable significance (Harman,1985:158). Internationally, Great Britain has just legislated the recommendations of its 1984 greenpaper, "Parental Influence at School" (H.M.S.O.,1984), following the earlier Taylor Report (1977). The National Governors' Association Task Force on Parent Involvement and Choice in the United States is recommending incentives and training for districts and their professional personnel to encourage greater parent participation in decision-making (Lamm,1986). This follows on from the Presidential Advisory Panel's (1983:6) push for shared decision making at the lowest possible level in order to attain maximum local control and accountability. In Australia, various states and territories have moved to give parents more influence in schools (Watkins,1985; Chapman and Boyd,1985; Fitzgerald and Pettit,1978). In Canada, Quebec has long led the way with obligatory parent participation in school governance, while most provinces have permissive legislation (Laplante,1982:13). In conducting the research it became apparent that parental influence, in its various manifestations, is a pervasive phenomenon in the schools and district though its salience varies amongst schools and amongst issues. As such, it is worthy of study.

Respondents' Views

Some respondents took the opportunity to query the commitment of the district in accepting parental influence as legitimate but their attitudes were based on particular incidents or actions by individuals. Very few thought parental influence was unimportant in determining what happens in schools and many saw the need for studying the subject. There was no evidence in what those who chose not to participate in the study said, or were reported to have said, to indicate they did not consider the subject important. Rather, the suggestions are that they may not have had much regard for educational research in general, and that they had not given much consideration to the request through careful reading of the letter and questionnaire.

Two teachers were very enthusiastic in writing. "I am very pleased to see that others are also concerned . . . . Hopefully, somehow it will help to change the attitude of some educators; that education is not the concern of the parents but only of those involved in the field of education." "Definitely important . . . . thank you for allowing me the opportunity." A principal wrote with emphasis: "Parents must have input into the policies, program and procedures that affect their children's education." When asked during the interview for their reaction to the questionnaire, three of the principals and a teacher spoke of the importance of the subject.

Differences Among Respondent Groups

No great differences were detected amongst the respondent groups with regard to their views on the importance of the phenomenon although willingness to participate might indicate mixed views amongst senior administrators. However, there is some suggestion from the data that they do not consider relationships with parents as part of their role.

As previously mentioned, there are problems with making comparisons from the aggregated questionnaire data. However, there is some indication that trustees tend to perceive more parental influence generally, followed by principals, senior administrators and teachers in that order (from a comparison of the average of the mean scores of each group [1.84, 1.80, 1.98 and 2.00 respectively] and from perusal of the results for the items which most clearly seem to indicate parental influence). This is important as it might be reasoned that trustees and principals are in the front-line in dealing with parents and hence best placed to observe influence. However, the questionnaire was not designed to allow such comparison and two of the groups are very small and so such indications can be no more than suggestions for possibly fruitful further research.

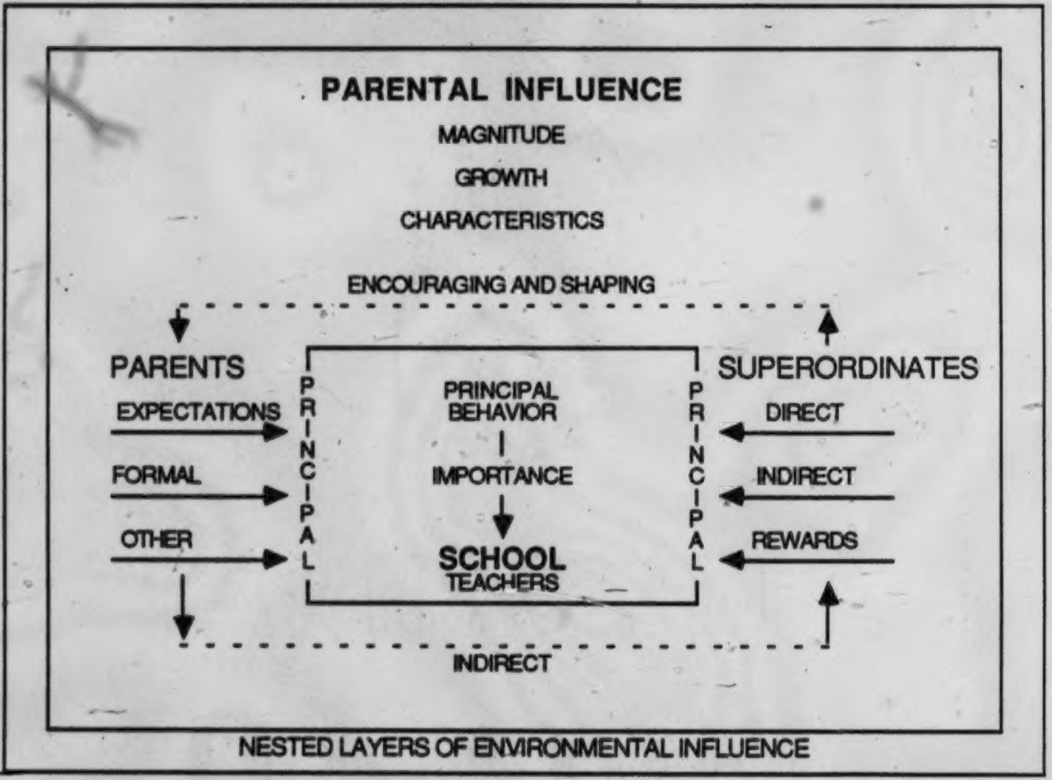
There was great similarity amongst the groups. All tended in the same direction in their responses and the ranking of the group means (see Appendix F) for the various questions confirms this. Allowing for the small size of two groups, which ensures their rankings show a lot of multiple placings, the overall rankings are remarkably similar.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Partly from the sub-questions listed under "Focus of the Study" in Chapter 3, and partly as a result of preliminary analysis of the data, the framework depicted in Figure 1 was developed for the detailed analysis of the data and the findings. The principal (and school) are shown as the smaller box in the centre surrounded by the larger box representing parental influence on the school which, because it does help to shape principal behavior, can be viewed as a control mechanism.

That there are other influences and controls is made clear by enclosing the parental influence box in another box to indicate that there is a context of other environments. These environments are described as nested layers. The school is part of a district, the district is part of a provincial environment; there are societal and economic environments, and so on. Environments are not discrete. They interact with, and constitute each other, in such complex ways as defy description. In the same way, while parents are shown as outside the boundary of the school, the data indicate that one reason they have become more influential in schools is because they are increasingly crossing the boundary and becoming involved with, or part of, the school organization.

Figure 1
ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR PARENTAL INFLUENCE


PARENTAL INFLUENCE
MAGNITUDE
GROWTH
CHARACTERISTICS
ENCOURAGING AND SHAPING
PARENTS
EXPECTATIONS
FORMAL
OTHER
PRINCIPAL
PRINCIPAL BEHAVIOR
IMPORTANCE
SCHOOL
TEACHERS
PRINCIPAL
SUPERORDINATES
DIRECT
INDIRECT
REWARDS
INDIRECT
NESTED LAYERS OF ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCE

The figure is a simplification to aid in thinking about and examining the data. There are many other influences on or controls over principals and they constitute a complex web. Added complication comes from the realization that, to some extent, principals can create their own environments. For example, the data indicate that how much a principal is influenced by parents is determined to some extent by the principal.

Parental influence is part of the school's environment acting as a control. How much it affects the school will partly depend on its magnitude. It is important to assess whether it is growing in strength, if future developments are to be predicted. And its characteristics are important since they might indicate just how schools are affected.

The central box is the school. If parental influence is exerted mainly on the principal then the influence should be reflected in the principal's behavior. Whether the principal's work behavior affects the school depends upon the principal's importance for the school. As teachers are such an essential component of the school it is important to know how they are affected by parental influence, whether directly or through the principal. The sides of the school box are the word "principal." This is to emphasize the middle, mediating and key role of the principal.

One way in which superordinates control principal behavior is by ensuring principals are responsive to parents. Superordinates facilitate parental influence by direct means such as policies and by indirect means such as the way parent complaints are handled. The reward system can incorporate both direct and indirect means by which principals are encouraged to be responsive to parental influence. Superordinates also facilitate the control by encouraging and shaping parental influence. They may, for example, try directly to get parents to become involved in schools by urging them to do so or by referring them back to the school when they have problems. They may shape parental influence by, for example, publicity for a particular innovation.

Parents influence schools through the expectations they have of principals and schools. The influence can be exerted through formally established means such as parent advisory committees, or through other direct and indirect means, such as complaints or simply by being in the school or through informal "chats" with the principal. The dotted line to superordinates indicates the ways in which parents may affect the principal and school through superordinates. Their complaints to trustees may, for example, be relayed to the school, or they may make submissions to the board, or they may force action about an incompetent teacher.

The following sections consider in greater detail these four perspectives from Figure 1.

Parental Influence as an Environmental Control

The first concern in analyzing the data is to establish the existence of the phenomenom: Is parental influence an important environmental control for schools and principals? To answer the question requires extracting from the data indications of the magnitude of the influence. These indications can be found in responses to questions about whether schools and parents differ since few differences might be taken to show the extent of efforts to reach agreement. Questions about the importance organizational participants give to parent expectations, and about the need to have parent support are other indicators of attitudes towards parental influence.

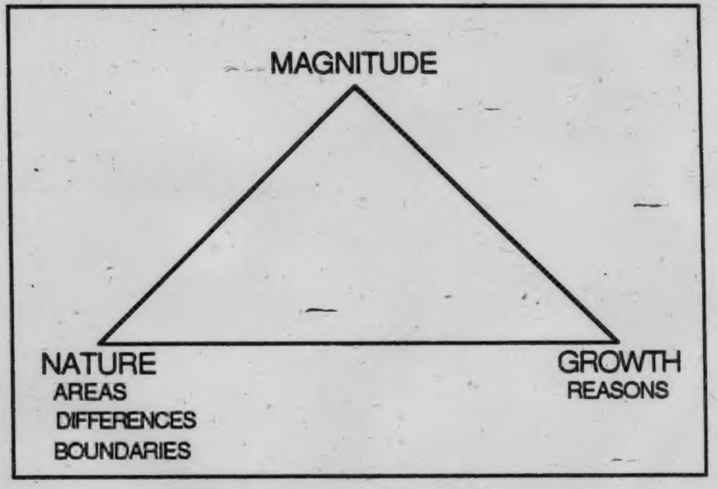
Two other aspects of the phenomenon of parental influence proved of interest. First, it is of some importance to establish whether it is perceived as a stable phenomenon or one which is growing. The literature would suggest that there is a trend to greater parental influence on schools. If this is so, then an understanding of what is happening is important because accommodations will have to be made.

Second, there is the question of the nature of parental influence. One depiction of the relationship sees parents as allowing a zone of tolerance or boundaries of varying width within which the school or principal is allowed a free hand. Parents intervene only when the boundaries are crossed. The conceptualization of variable boundaries raises the question of whether parental influence varies amongst different areas of school operations, being stronger for some than for others. Or, from an inside perpective, whether parents are allowed more influence over some activities than over others. The existence of varying influence may be established through examination of perceptions of the areas that parents do influence and those where there are differences between what schools do and what parents want.

Figure 2 presents these aspects of the phenomenon which will be pursued in the data analysis in Chapter 6.

Figure 2

CHARACTERISTICS OF PARENTAL INFLUENCE



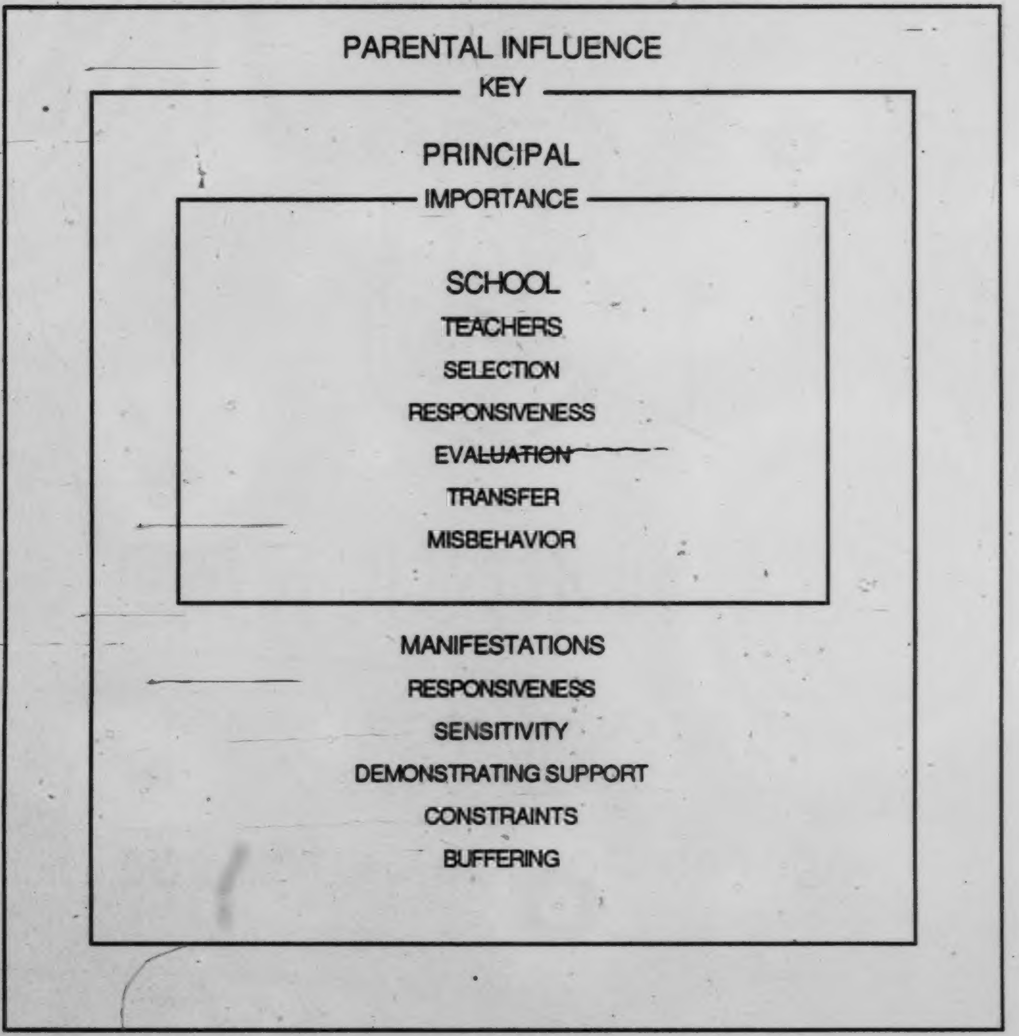
The Principal and Parental Influence

A presupposition, drawn from the literature, is that the principal is the key to parental influence on schools. Perception of the significance of the principal in mediating parental influence comes from the data. It is on the principal that most influence is exerted and how the principal responds is the key to the effect such influence has on the school. This requires some examination of just how important the principal is for the school -- whether the principal is the immediate determinant of what happens in schools. Evidence here can be gathered through perceptions of the responsibilities of principals and whether influencing the principal can make a difference because he has the capacity to influence the school. This involves consideration of principals' discretion and autonomy.

Figure 3 depicts these strands according to the simplified conceptualization that parental influence acts largely on the principal who in turn determines what occurs in the school and consequently, how much influence the parents have on school operations.

The principal is shown as the key to parental influence according to the principal's importance for the school. In a very real sense the principal creates the environment for the school by mediating the influences impinging on it, not only from parents but also from superordinates. This can also be described in terms of the principal's middle role.

Figure 3
PRINCIPAL AND PARENTAL INFLUENCE


PARENTAL INFLUENCE
KEY
PRINCIPAL
IMPORTANCE
SCHOOL
TEACHERS
SELECTION
RESPONSIVENESS
EVALUATION
TRANSFER
MISBEHAVIOR
MANIFESTATIONS
RESPONSIVENESS
SENSITIVITY
DEMONSTRATING SUPPORT
CONSTRAINTS
BUFFERING

If the principal is perceived as in the "middle," there is an implication that parents have influence which the principal must endeavour to coordinate with other and possibly competing influences, such as teacher expectations or the policies of superordinates. A mediator role for the principal suggests that there is some weight on the parents' side, as does an expectation by superordinates that, as a senior administrator expressed it, "the principal should control his parents." The relationship between the controller and the controlled is not a one way street -- people cannot be led where they will not follow. There have to be some concessions to the wishes of the controlled or the followers.

The influence of parents on the principal can be ascertained from its manifestations in the behavior of the principal who shows a propensity to demonstrate parent support. The principal may show responsiveness and sensitivity to parents through minimizing differences with them, accepting their views in preference to his own, attaching considerable importance to their complaints and trying to resolve their concerns without superiors being involved. Acceptance of constraints on the principal's decision making can demonstrate influence. In contrast, the principal's work behavior may also manifest a buffering role with regard to parents in mediating their influence on teachers and superordinates.

The manifestations of parental influence can also be seen from a teacher perspective, although it may be mediated by the principal. Influence might be seen in the responsiveness of teachers to parents or in teacher selection, evaluation and transfer. If parents ensure action on teacher misbehavior, then there is evidence of influence.

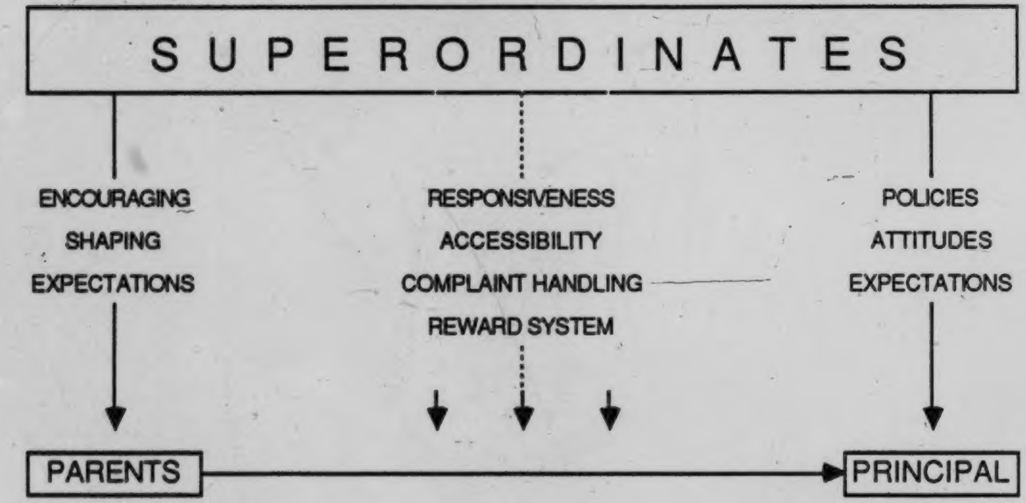
Superordinates and Parental Influence

The principals' superordinates are central office personnel ranking above principal and include trustees (and the provincial education department). There is a chain of command with an immediate line superior (area superintendent) but other superordinates can influence principals either through the area superintendent or directly. Trustees deserve special attention because they claim to represent parents.

Superordinates can facilitate parental influence on principals. If they do so, they are in effect using parental influence as an environmental control over principal behavior whether they acknowledge the mechanism or not. The mechanism is represented schematically in Figure 4.

Figure 4

SUPERORDINATES AND PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON PRINCIPALS


SUPERORDINATES
ENCOURAGING
SHAPING
EXPECTATIONS
RESPONSIVENESS
ACCESSIBILITY
COMPLAINT HANDLING
REWARD SYSTEM
POLICIES
ATTITUDES
EXPECTATIONS
PARENTS
PRINCIPAL

Superordinates may facilitate the exercise of parental influence by sensitizing principals to be responsive to parents. This can be done directly through hierarchical methods such as explicit policies and instructions or attitudes or it can be conveyed indirectly through attitudes and actions. The principal reacts to the message conveyed by superordinates through both acceptance of hierarchical control and because it is in the principal's own interest to so so.

In analyzing the data, overt policies, expectations and attitudes are examined as well as indirect indications to principals of the importance of parents. The latter may be conveyed through the access parents are given to superordinates or in the manner in which their complaints are handled. The reward system of the district may facilitate parents' influence because of: their role in selection, evaluation, promotion and transfer of principals and teachers; the part they play in school evaluation; and the consequences for a principal who loses parent support. In the figure the central indicators show the indirect ways in which superordinates affect the relationship between parents and principal by sensitizing the principal to influence.

Another aspect of the mechanism is the direct relationship of the superordinates with parents. The major questions would seem to be whether the principal's superordinates encourage parents to exert influence on principals, and whether they endeavour to shape the expectations that parents have of principals and schools, both for receptivity to parental influence and on specific matters.

Parents, Their Influence, and the Principal

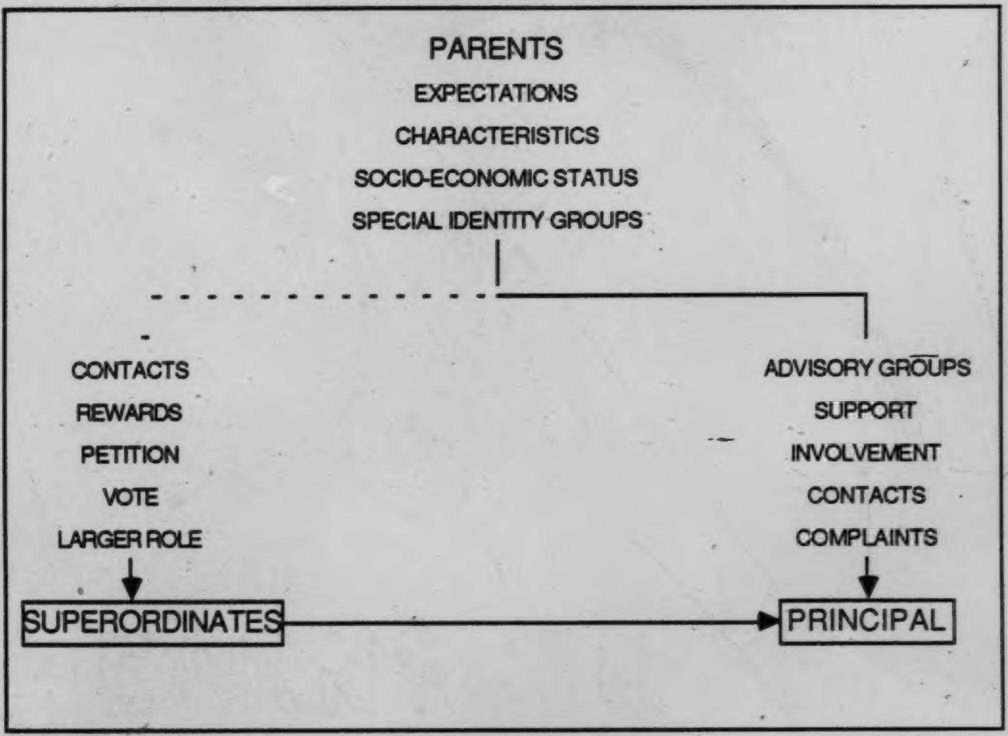
The data gathered revealed organizational participants' perceptions about parents and the means by which they influence schools. Figure 5 is a schematic representation of the parent perspective.

Consideration of the role of parents involves their expectations but also led in data gathering to the question, "Which parents?" Normally only some parents actively exert influence and an attempt was made to extract from the data indications as to the characteristics of these parents, as well as perceptions regarding the traditional view that higher socio-economic status is associated with influence. Special identity groups were often referred to by respondents as examples of effective parental influence.

There are formal means for parents to influence principals. In nearly all the schools, parent advisory committees (or some similar name) were a means of parents' influencing principals. So perceptions of the operation and effectiveness of these was called for, as well as some consideration of kindergarten or early childhood where provincial policies provide for parental influence and a local advisory committee is the vehicle.

Parents influence through the various ways in which they support the school and through their formal and informal contacts with principal and staff. Such contacts increase with involvement of parents in the school. Parent complaints are a particular form of contact in which the influence attempt is obvious.

Figure 5
MEANS BY WHICH PARENTS INFLUENCE PRINCIPALS


PARENTS
EXPECTATIONS
CHARACTERISTICS
SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS
SPECIAL IDENTITY GROUPS
CONTACTS
REWARDS
PETITION
VOTE
LARGER ROLE
ADVISORY GROUPS
SUPPORT
INVOLVEMENT
CONTACTS
COMPLAINTS
SUPERORDINATES
PRINCIPAL

The dotted line to superordinates in Figure 5 indicates more indirect influence of parents on the principal. Here again there are formal and informal contacts through which parents exert influence. They may also influence operation of the reward system. One technique for exerting influence is to petition superordinates to do something in connection with the school. Parents also influence schools indirectly through voting for those trustees whose policies they favour and, as the data revealed, by pursuing through parent advisory committees a wider role than the school-only one assigned to them.

SUMMARY

This chapter began with a description of the approaches used in analyzing the data available from the three sources. This was followed by an assessment of the research instruments based on experience with their use and the reactions of respondents. As part of an overall review of the data the importance of parental influence as an area for study was examined. The limitations of any examination for differences amongst the respondent groups were outlined. A framework was described for use in analyzing the data overall and four other frameworks were presented to allow detailed analysis of the data. The first dealt with the existence of parental influence as a control, and the others take the perspectives of principals, superordinates and parents. The following four chapters analyze the data on the bases of these frameworks.

CHAPTER VI

PARENTAL INFLUENCE AS AN ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL

This chapter examines the data with regard to parental influence as a control over schools and principals. For the purposes of this examination, "principal" and "school" are often used interchangeably. How they interrelate is taken up in the following chapter, which examines perceptions as to whether influence on the principal equates with influence on the school.

The first section is concerned with evidence from the data which establishes the magnitude or significance or importance for schools of parental influence. This leads to the question of whether the data support the view that parental influence on schools has been increasing. Then follows an examination of the data for indications of the nature of the influence on schools by considering whether influence varies in different areas of school operation, and matters on which differences occur between parents and schools. Finally, the chapter assesses the data from the perspective of parents' establishing broad boundaries within which schools have discretion.

In examining the data the results from the appropriate questionnaire items are looked at first, and then the interview data are introduced for confirmation, explanation, embellishment, and related insights. Pertinent documents are analyzed for the same purpose.

MAGNITUDE

The previous chapter drew attention to the absence of any indication from over 200 respondents in the pilot testing and study that parental influence on principal behavior was not significant for schools. While some respondents indicated parents did not specifically influence particular schools, there was agreement that parental influence was important in some schools and that the individual school, whether its particular parents are active or not, is set within a context of parental influence that applies to all schools. The purpose of this section is to examine the data in order to assess the magnitude of parental influence -- to try to answer the question of how important it is.

Questionnaire Data

The Questions. Eight questions sought information about the perceived importance of parental influence on schools. Both trustees and senior administrators were asked whether they would maintain their own position in face of parental opposition, while principals were asked about their differences with parents. Three of the questions for all respondents dealt with perceptions of schools doing what parents wanted while two asked about the importance of principals and the district meeting parent wishes or expectations.

Part I. Question 1. How important, generally, are differences between what schools do and what parents think they should be doing?

As shown in Table 9, only eight percent of all respondents thought the differences between what schools do, and what parents think they should do, are unimportant. There is very considerable agreement amongst all four groups that the differences are at least important. Principals exhibited the greatest range of variability in responses (10 percent unimportant and 32 percent very important).

The perceived importance of the differences may indicate there are limitations to the influence of parents since it might be expected that influence would tend to reduce the differences. Another interpretation is that the attributed importance accounts for attempts to achieve congruence -- to avoid differences because they are viewed as important, if not dysfunctional. Data presented later tend to support this conclusion, as does a district survey of 10 percent of parents, from whom there was nearly a 50 percent return rate, just over a year before this study, which indicated very high levels of parent satisfaction (up to 87 percent) "toward the education of their children in the school district" (mimeographed copy,1985). However, that survey did identify quite a number of areas where there was lesser satisfaction and in some cases the "undecided" percentage was fairly large.

Table 9
Differences Between School and Parents
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	1 (17)	5 (83)			6
Senior Administrator	2 (22)	7 (78)			9
Principal	13 (32)	24 (59)	4 (10)		41
Teacher	27 (27)	67 (66)	7 (7)	1 (1)	102
Total	43 (27)	103 (65)	11 (7)	1 (1)	158

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

Part I. Question 2. With what importance, generally, does a school staff regard parental expectations?

Table 10 shows that organizational participants perceive school staff as taking parental expectations very seriously and attaching considerable importance to them, with only one respondent, a teacher, answering "unimportant."

The importance was emphasized in a written comment by a senior administrator: "School staff in general react very strongly to parent expectations." While the significance of the differences among respondents is difficult to analyze, it appears trustees tend to see school staff giving more importance to parental expectations than the other groups, especially the principals, where only 21 percent responded with "very important". The difference might be explained in terms of trustees' general tendency to rate parental influence as more important throughout the questionnaire, and they would include principals in their understanding of "a school staff", while principals would have in mind the teachers. Principals' responses elsewhere indicate they perceive themselves as strongly influenced by parents.

Table 10
School Staff and Parental Expectations
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	4 (67)	2 (33)	-	-	6
Senior Administrator	3 (33)	6 (67)	-	-	9
Principal	9 (21)	33 (79)	-	-	42
Teacher	32 (31)	71 (68)	1 (1)	-	104
Total	48 (30)	112 (70)	1 (1)	-	161

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

The importance school staff are perceived to give to parental expectations is a reasonable indication that parents have considerable influence.

Part I. Question 4. In your school district how important is it that principals gain, and maintain, parental support?

The ratings for this question, shown in Table 11, are noteworthy. There is almost unanimity among respondent groups. Trustees, senior administrators and principals gave this item the most importance in all thirty questions. Teachers in aggregate rated the question second in terms of lowest mean, that is, tending towards most important. If the slightly lower mean rating for importance by teachers has significance it possibly reflects their lack of knowledge of the scene outside the classroom, the results of principals' buffering , and their relative insulation from parents, as other results reported later, suggest.

Table 11
Principal and Parent Support in District
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	5 (83)	1 (17)	-	-	6
Senior Administrator	7 (78)	2 (22)	-	-	9
Principal	36 (86)	6 (14)	-	-	42
Teacher	61 (59)	42 (40)	1 (1)	-	104
Total	109 (68)	51 (32)	1 (1)	-	161

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

Only one respondent perceived it as unimportant in the school district for principals to gain and maintain parental support, while 68 percent perceived it as very important. The percentage was much higher for those above teachers in the hierarchy. If having parental support entails being receptive to parental influence, as might reasonably be supposed, then it is clear that organizational participants do see principals in the district as subject to considerable influence by parents.

Part I. Question 8. How important is it that a principal accept the wishes of parents generally, even though he or she might disagree?

Although opinion is divided, Table 12 shows there is still a substantial majority perception (73 percent) amongst organizational participants that it is at least important for a principal to accept the wishes of parents generally, even though the principal disagrees. Majority opinion in all groups was that principals should allow parents to override their own wishes.

Table 12
Principals Accepting Though Disagreeing
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	1 (17)	4 (67)	1 (17)	-	6
Senior Administrator	1 (11)	5 (56)	3 (33)	-	9
Principal	1 (2)	32 (76)	9 (21)	-	42
Teacher	3 (3)	70 (67)	30 (29)	1 (1)	102
Total	6 (4)	111 (69)	43 (27)	1 (1)	161

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

Trustees had the highest percentage perceiving the importance of principals accepting parent wishes, followed by principals themselves and then teachers. The small number of senior administrators responding does not provide a basis for confidence in the results. However, the result is consistent with senior administrators expecting principals to buffer against parents. While there was a strong tendency overall to respond "important," it may be significant that only one respondent in each of the three higher organizational levels, and three teachers, answered "very important". This would seem to be consistent with an interpretation that while the views of parents should be afforded importance in making a decision, and perhaps generally should be decisive, they should not be automatically acceded to. The overall impression from the data is that respondents perceive a substantial but not absolute weighting for generally held parent views in guiding principals.

Six respondents commented on this question. Three were concerned that the response would vary with "the nature of the demands," "the source of the complaint," or, as one who did not give a rating wrote, "I can see situations where 1 would be the answer and again in other situations 4." Two others thought parent views had to be given "consideration at least" ("2" was the response), and "It is important that he listens but this does not mean he _must_ accept and carry out their wishes." A teacher's view about the consequences of not agreeing with parents was straightforward: "They will contact the school board and make his life as an administrator rather miserable." The comments confirm the importance of parental influence but are qualified by concern that other considerations must also be taken into account. It is as though respondents generally feel, as a trustee said, that the principal "ignores parent wishes at his peril."

Part I. Question 10. What importance should the school district give to parents' expectations of the school their children attend?

Table 13 indicates perceptions amongst organizational participants tended very much towards the view that the school district should regard parent expectations as important with only six responding "unimportant". Once again this seems a clear indication of support, although qualified, for parental influence. The enthusiasm of the trustees is obvious while principals and teachers are more restrained though still very strongly favoring "important." While it is difficult to draw conclusions, the reversal in the order of percentages in comparing "very important" with "important" is consistent with a fairly common expression of resentment amongst principals and teachers that central office and board do not give them enough support in dealing with parents and are too willing to agree to parent demands. In sum, the general tenor of the responses suggests that parental influence on the district should be strong and this is most noticeable amongst those functioning at the district level -- trustees and senior administrators.

Table 13
Parent Expectations and the District
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	4 (67)	2 (33)	-	-	6
Senior Administrator	4 (44)	4 (44)	1 (11)	-	9
Principal	9 (21)	31 (74)	2 (5)	-	42
Teacher	17 (17)	83 (81)	3 (3)	-	101
Total	34 (21)	120 (75)	6 (4)	-	160

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

Part II, Question 3, Trustees. Should trustees support a decision they feel is correct, even though a majority of the community is opposed?

Part II, Question 5, Senior Administrators. Would you maintain a decision, even though you knew a majority of the parents concerned was opposed?

Part II, Question 7, Principals. Are there differences between what you think you should be doing as a principal and what your school's parents think you should be doing?

While these three questions are different, with the one to principals clearly so, juxtaposing responses, as in Table 14, serves the purpose of allowing comparison of orientations. The trustees and senior administrators incline in different directions as might be expected since the trustees see themselves as representing the community, while the senior administrators are professionals and make decisions on that basis. In terms of influence from the community, trustees appear more disposed to accommodate it. The principals' responses indicate they do not perceive a great number of differences between their own views and those of parents. While there could be argument as to the specific meaning of the responses, it seems clear that trustees allow of much greater possibility for parental influence while senior administrators do not rule it out, and principals perceive their own views as largely aligned with parents. This result for principals might indicate influence, especially as in question 8, 78 percent of principals thought it important to accept parent wishes even though they disagreed. However, responses to Question 1 in Part I indicated most principals thought the differences between what schools do, and what parents would have them do, are at least important.

Table 14
Not Accepting Community/Parent Influence
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Usually	Frequently	Occasionally	Seldom	Rarely	N
Trustee	-	-	5 (83)	1 (17)	-	6
Senior Administrators	4 (44)	2 (22)	3 (33)	-	-	9
Principal	-	-	22 (52)	17 (41)	3 (7)	42

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

Summary. The purpose of this section was to assess the questionnaire data for evidence of how much influence parents have on schools. The data point to strong perceived influence. School staff are seen as giving importance to parental expectations and there is almost unanimous agreement that the district should do so. Respondents thought it was very important for principals to have parental support even to the extent, as a large majority indicated, of accepting parent views against the principal's own. Trustees consider they should largely follow community wishes, while senior administrators see themselves as more prepared to resist. Principals perceive fairly few occasions on which they differ with their parents. Thus, there are grounds for claiming that parents do have considerable influence on schools and principals. However, there still remains a perception that there are important differences between what schools do and what parents would like them to do.

Interviews and Written Comments

The interviews confirmed that parents are perceived as having a very significant influence on schools. Virtually all interviewees seemed to accept this without question and, although no specific question dealt with the magnitude of the influence, there were repeated indications that it is of considerable significance.

The nearest to a direct question on magnitude was that for trustees which asked whether there were any special features of their district with regard to parental influence which made it different from others. While they were not asked to make a comparision with the public district in the city, most did so. Nearly all the trustees thought their district had more parental influence but did not advance much evidence other than to refer to its being a "Catholic" education system which produces what one called a "milieu, ambience". Another commented that "The ice is much thinner for the other public schools because they have such varied publics."

The argument that a Catholic system has greater parental influence appeared to be two-pronged. First, because Catholics share so much in common, the district and its schools are more attuned to parents. In the words of one trustee, "We always have the fact that we're a Catholic system with commonality and homogeneity. We aren't exposed to the negative and myopic as in other systems where self-interest groups are active." A teacher pointed out that there was no controversy about teaching sex education and family life. Second, there is the specific Catholic philosophy that the parents are the prime educators and the school is the agent of parents -- a philosophy reflected in the opening words only of the district's mission statement, Policy 100. This relationship was reaffirmed by a trustee who claimed: "The Catholic philosophy makes us more amenable to parent influence . . . . Parents are responsible in the last analysis and only delegate to schools." This assumption might be open to some challenge on the basis of arguments presented by Erickson et al. (1979) and their report of an interview study in the province which concluded that parents and teachers did not see differences between public and Catholic schools where both were publicly funded and regulated.

In discussing their willingness to make a decision against parent wishes, the trustees opted for a mid-position on what one called "the fundamental democratic question." One said there "should be a little bit of both -- representing parents and deciding for yourself." Another explained that "You have to consider parent views but they have to be rationalized with all the other inputs in order to make a balanced decision."

Senior administrators were least informative about the magnitude of parental influence, possibly because they do not see it as particularly relevant to their job except when they have to become involved with a parent issue. One commented, "It's mainly a matter of hearing from principals in getting a reading on what parents think." No senior administrator saw much need, personally, to specifically develop a means of monitoring parental influence. There is some confirmation of this lack of appreciation of the realities of parental influence amongst senior administrators in the comments of a principal who took up his position after seventeen years in central office and found the extent of parental influence an "eye opener."

Principals seemed much more aware of parental influence though all might not go as far as their colleagues who made the following statements. "Parents can get 'anything' they want if they know the correct channels and are persistent." "You can't hide anything from parents. They soon become leery and start moving." "A person would not institute a policy that would upset parents." "Any principal who bucks the community is moved. Parents can get together and go down to the central office and get what they want." Perhaps the view of most principals is best summed up in the comment that "It would be foolish not to listen." But the principals were also, like the trustees, eager to point out that at times they had to refuse to meet parent wishes because of competing considerations. This more balanced view is seen in: "I believe in being sensitive to parents to a reasonable level but not in bending over backwards for the impossible"; "At least it makes me think, but it does not necessarily change anything."

In comments on the questionnaire, teachers showed considerable awareness of parental influence. One wrote: "Today's schools are definitely aware of parents, and responsive to their needs and wants . . . . Schools can not operate without parental support. . . . concerned parents have an enormous influence on school, school policy etc." Another said, "Parents have more influence than teachers. That is, if a teacher complains about a large class size, generally nothing is done. If parents complain, and go through proper channels, their request would be granted almost immediately." Others made clear they thought parents had too much influence: "Principals try to please parents too much. They avoid clashes . . . . Schools should be clearer, more assertive in stating their policies in order to avoid having parents shakedown the school or have them control it." A teacher from one school, whose comments were confirmed by another, wrote about parents getting a split-class decision overturned, a teacher retired prematurely, a principal transferred, and premature adoption of curriculum innovations, as well as many other changes. She summed up: "Some decisions were good -- some were not good." Generally, teachers recognized that parents exert considerable influence and many offered a balanced view, well represented by the following: "Naturally there are problems that arise because of the close working relationship that teachers have with parents. These problems have to be carefully handled by the administration. The principal is most concerned about maintaining positive relations with parents."

Documentation

There is little documentation referring to the magnitude of parental influence in the district. The school as agent of the parent forms the substance of the first sentence of the mission statment and is elaborated a little more in a pamphlet available from the district, entitled "Catholic Schools. They are unique." This pamphlet argues the case for having a separate system of schooling and emphasizes that "the right to education is primarily a parental right" and "provincially funded Catholic schools exist to support the work of the home and parish." But few, if any, implications of this view for school operations are advanced. A district "Handbook", presumably for parents, gives a very short description of each of its schools. The most common element in the descriptions is reference to parents or community in terms of "support" and "responsive." These concepts are referred to over twenty times which would imply an effort to stress the importance of the school's relationship with community and parents.

Summary

While no measure can be applied to gauge the magnitude of parental influence, the data seem to clearly indicate that it is perceived as very significant by organizational participants. For three groups it is an important part of the reality of schools, although not without limits. Senior administrators acknowledge its existence although they might be most insulated from its impact. These conclusions become the first two propositions drawn from the data.

Proposition 1. Trustees, senior administrators, principals and teachers perceive that parents exert a strong influence on schools.

Proposition 2. Senior administrators perceive less parental influence on schools than do trustees, principals and teachers.

Another indicator of magnitude lies in the perceived increase in parental influence which is the subject of the next section. In announcing to staff and justifying a current review of the "Functional Organization of the Senior Administration," the chief superintendent gave as one of the significant developments since the last review the fact that "The district has been consciously extending authority and responsibility for educational decision making to local school communities." (School Bulletin, Appendix D)

GROWTH OF PARENTAL INFLUENCE

Interviewees were asked whether, in their experience, there had been an increase in the influence parents are having on their children's schools. Apart from a few spontaneous comments on the questionnaire all the data come from interview records. There was virtually unanimous agreement that parental influence on schools has grown and a variety of reasons were advanced to explain the growth.

Growth

Most of the interviewees thought there had been a substantial increase in parental influence in recent years. Two senior administrators pointed to the fact that schools used to have silent telephone numbers, while a principal claimed that "Before, the school was unchallenged, whereas now it is continually questioned." And a teacher said, "You can't look sideways at a kid now without some parent screaming abuse." A few qualified their answers, such as the principal, for example, whose drawing area had shown a sharp drop in socio-economic status, or those who pointed out only some parents were involved, or that the influence varied from school to school: "A dichotomy of very much or none at all," as a principal said.

Reasons

Many reasons were advanced for the increase in parental influence and they constitute an interwoven fabric in which the strands reinforce and affect one another. The following are those most commonly expressed.

Child's Future. Some saw parents' interest, and hence attempts to influence, as stemming from parents' concern for their children's future in times when education is seen as the key to both economic success and a satisfying life. Current economic problems were perceived to have accentuated the concern.

Professional Encouragement. Many pointed out that there was a two-way process. Not only were parents seeking more influence but they were being encouraged to get involved with schools by the professionals themselves because, as one trustee said, "all the educational literature recommends it" or, as another said, it is "just good education for the principal to ensure he has parent support." Times have changed since Seeley et al. (1956) found that a favorite in-group joke of teachers in a Canadian suburb was to define the ideal child as an orphan. Teachers are coming to believe that parent involvement and participation can benefit the child's education. For example, teachers said: "In this school it wasn't because of outside influence; the principal and teachers brought it about themselves" or "The growth doesn't cause problems ultimately because school and parents reinforce one another's decisions." Some even saw it as an ethical matter since, as one teacher expressed it, "If administration has a valid view, it/he/she should morally sell that view to parents for validation."

It seemed to be widely accepted that as parents become involved with the school their influence increases -- they are better informed and better placed to make their influence felt. A principal pointed out that once a close relationship is established, there are no grounds for curbing parents' interest in any aspect of the school. Similarly, it seems be be a common practice amongst principals to take advantage of the presence of parents in the school to talk to them about the school in order to assess parent feelings. A teacher commented that the more frequent parent presence in the school resulted in "more important and realistic demands." Another commented, from a different perspective, "When parents are part of the decision making process in the school, they are motivated to help out."

It was also pointed out that the school district promoted parent involvement in the schools and parents' participation in decision-making in an advisory capacity. From another perspective a principal commented that the district's actions promoted sensitivity to parents: "The lack of support from senior administrators and school boards enables small parent factions to dictate policy." The communications officer, in her booklet, How to Sell Your School, points out that "The responsibility of the administration is to de-mystify the school; to make parents feel that it is an open, caring place that they can be part of " (p.5), and her "Communications Plan" (mimeographed, Appendix D) expresses concern that "Catholic parents in particular, remain informed regarding the extent to which the Catholic schools are meeting their mandate." The district's Calendar for the school year emphasizes that "Parents can participate" and details how they can.

A few interviewees mentioned provincial encouragement of parent participation, particularly in areas where it was tied to funding, such as early childhood and special education.

Another reason professionals encourage parents was stated rather succinctly by a teacher with the comment that the current "excess of teachers and principals" made the schools more concerned with client satisfaction. Students and their parents have become much more important because the system and the schools need them -- there is no longer a guaranteed supply of this resource and its accompanying funds. This reason, and the declining proportion of parents amongst taxpayers, caused one principal to observe: "Marketing is the in-word for the year."

Accountability. Growing parental influence was seen by some interviewees as an expression of the demand for greater accountability growing out of harder economic times, the increasing cost to parents of schooling, negative community views about education, and a general movement towards calling to account those entrusted with societal functions. A teacher claimed that "Whatever schools do ends up on the front page now," while a principal pointed out that the Keegstra affair made parents aware of the need to check on what happens at school.

Choice. Affluence, diversification of school programs, and empty classrooms mean parents can "shop around" in a "buyer's market." A teacher summed-up the situation this way: "Many parents are shopping for the school that offers programs to best fit the needs of their child. Principals are aware of this and gear many of their programs and curriculum-related decisions to priorities expressed by the parents."

Parent Capacities. About a quarter of the interviewees attributed greater parental influence to changes in the characteristics of parents. They are viewed as being better educated, more knowledgeable about schooling, more aware that learning disabilities can be overcome, mostly second or third generation Canadians, more interested in their children, more able to give time to school affairs, and having greater aspirations for their children. Partly because of some of these factors they are also, as a principal said, "More politically astute and know how to manipulate for what they want."

Interest Groups and Issues. Many of the interviewees referred to particular interest groups or issues as giving rise to greater parental influence because of the commitment they can engender for the particular cause and because of the sacrifice often involved in pursuing them. Examples given were second language programs, school closures, amalgamations and contractions.

Summary

The considerable magnitude of ~~parental~~ influence on schools is substantiated by interviewees' generally firm conviction that the influence has increased considerably in recent years. The factors they cited in explanation of this phenomenon suggest that this growth in influence will continue as there is no reason to expect that over the long term any of the factors will cease to be important or cease to increase in salience. These conclusions are the basis for the following proposition.

Proposition 3. Parental influence on schools has increased and will become a progressively more significant influence on school administrators.

NATURE OF PARENTAL INFLUENCE

This section is concerned with extracting from the data perceptions of the features of parental influence as it affects schools. In particular, it looks at perceptions of whether parents tend to be more influential in some areas of school operations and, as a corollary, if the matters on which principals and parents differ reveal any patterns. Finally, it examines respondents' reactions to the notion that parents establish boundaries to schools' discretion.

Areas of Influence

Questionnaire Data. Four questions were posed to all respondents to explore whether parental influence differed between the more professional or 'core' curricular matters as opposed to administrative matters. Additionally, principals were asked to complete a special section intended to elicit their perceptions of the strength of parental influence on them for examples drawn from six broad divisions of their work.

Part I Question 13. How important is parental reaction in a principal's assessment of the success of a curriculum program, e.g., a computer course?

Part I Question 14. How important is parental reaction in a principal's assessment of the success of an administrative practice, e.g., school dismissal times?

A comparison of Tables 15 and 16 shows the differences in responses to the two questions are consistently in the direction that might be expected. However, the differences are not of such a size as to indicate that respondents perceive that parents have much greater influence on a principal's assessment of administrative practices than on curricular matters. Overall, parental reaction is perceived as important in a principal's assessment of both. The differences between trustees and senior administrators on the two questions are in opposite directions but, because of the small groups, represent the effects of only one person in each group.

Table 15
Parents and Assessment of Curriculum
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	2 (33)	4 (67)	-	-	6
Senior Administrator	3 (33)	5 (56)	1 (11)	-	9
Principal	7 (17)	26 (63)	7 (17)	1 (2)	41
Teacher	18 (17)	60 (58)	22 (21)	4 (4).	104
Total	30 (19)	95 (59)	30 (19)	5 (3)	160

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

Table 16
Parents and Assessment of Administrative Practices
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	1 (17)	4 (67)	1 (17)	-	6
Senior Administrator	4 (44)	5 (56)	-	-	9
Principal	11 (26)	26 (62)	4 (10)	1 (22)	42
Teacher	20 (19)	60 (58)	22 (21)	2 (2)	104
Total	36 (22)	95 (59)	27 (17)	3 (2)	161

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

The two bigger groups are consistent in their responses with those of senior administrators who perceive, as a group, more importance given to parent reactions to administrative practices. However, in administrative matters senior administrators perceive more parental influence than do principals who perceive more than teachers.

The reason may be that it is in the area of administrative practices that senior administrators most often have to intervene in school problems with parents. On the other hand, teachers may be less aware of what actually occurs.

The examples given in the questionnaire items to help respondents may have guided their thinking. The choice of an example for curriculum was determined by the latitude the province allows for local decision. However, some respondents appear to believe all curricula are fixed by the province. With regard to administrative practices, school dismissal times are of concern to the district.

Nonetheless, it should not be overlooked that parent reaction is seen by about 80 percent of all respondents to the two items as at least important in a principal's assessment of success. Slightly more influence was perceived for parents in assessing the success of administrative practices than for curriculum. As reported later, only a third of the interviewees thought parents should have no role in curriculum matters.

Part I, Question 15. How important is parental opinion in a principal's decision on whether to introduce something new in the curriculum, e.g., options?

Part I, Question 16 How important is parental opinion in a principal's decision to change an administrative practice, e.g., the period for reporting to parents on student progress?

As can be seen by comparing Tables 17 and 18 the differences in responses to these two questions are not large. The results are in accord with what might be expected only in that the aggregated responses for two groups (trustees and senior administrators) show a perception of parental opinion being more important for administrative practices than for curricular matters.

A senior administrator, perhaps reflecting the matters in which he gets involved, commented: "In reality, matters involving administrative practices are of more importance to parents than curriculum." However, principals and teachers do not perceive it this way as in aggregate they perceive parental opinion carrying more weight with principals in curricular innovation decisions than in decisions on changes in administrative practices.

Table 17
Parents and Curriculum Introduction
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	1 (17)	2 (33)	3 (50)	-	6
Senior Administrator	2 (22)	4 (44)	3 (33)	-	9
Principal	7 (17)	29 (69)	6 (14)	-	42
Teacher	12 (12)	62 (60)	28 (27)	1 (1)	103
Total	22 (14)	97 (61)	40 (25)	1 (1)	160

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

Table 18
Parents and Changing Administrative Practices
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	1 (17)	5 (83)	-	-	6
Senior Administrator	2 (22)	7 (78)	-	-	9
Principal	8 (19)	23 (55)	10 (24)	1 (2)	42
Teacher	14 (14)	49 (47)	36 (35)	5 (5)	104
Total	25 (16)	84 (52)	46 (29)	6 (4)	162

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

Once again, the examples suggested could have biased the responses. A senior administrator noted, in referring to reporting periods, that "Much of this is a district decision." But, in contrast, a principal cited an example of his having to withdraw from earlier school commencement because of lack of support from the district. A teacher noted parents could discuss progress any time. However, another accepted the example and gave additional examples concerning lunch room and inclement weather.

The major finding from the responses is that there is a strong overall perception (75 percent for question 15 and 68 percent for question 16) that parent opinions are perceived as important in introducing both curricular and administrative changes.

Assessment and Change. The mean responses for all respondents on the four questions reveal a tendency for principals to be perceived as giving more weight to parental influence in assessing success of a curricular program or administrative practice than in making a decision on whether to innovate in these matters. For curricular matters the assessment mean is 2.06 and the innovation mean is 2.13, while for administrative practices the respective figures are 1.98 and 2.21. A problem in drawing any conclusion may be that on curricular matters the key group (principals) does not agree with the other three groups (means of 2.05 and 1.98 respectively). Still, there is an overall tendency, slight as it is, to perceive principals as paying less attention to parental opinion in deciding to make changes, particularly in administrative practices, than they do in assessing the success of curricular and administrative matters.

Part II. Principals. Question 8.

In this question, for which the format was adapted from Grassie (1979a), principals were asked to imagine that some parents had indicated both in public and by private correspondence that they saw a need for change in what the school was doing in each of six major areas of principal work activity. They were to assume that the individual proposals were not outrageous, but adoption would mean some change from current practice.

The areas were based on the six major areas of principals' work identified by

Miklos (1975).

An example, as follows, was chosen for each.

a. Community involvement in the formulation of school objectives.

b. Instructional methods used in the classroom.

c. Standards for student conduct.

d. Assignment of teachers to grades or classes.

e. Recommendations for changes to school buildings.

f. Expenditure of school funds.

Principals were asked to give a rating according to the following scale:

1. I would feel I had no choice but to initiate the change.
2. I would feel strongly compelled to consider the change but I might just not make it.
3. I would feel moderately strongly compelled to consider the change and more often than not I would make it.
4. I would feel not even moderately strongly compelled to consider the change and most often I would not make it.
5. I would feel no compulsion at all to consider the change and would ignore the proposal.

The results are shown in Table 19. From 250 responses (two principals each omitted a response), 160 gave a rating of 3 or less. That is, nearly two thirds of the responses indicated the principals would at least feel moderately strongly compelled to make the change and more often than not would make it. This is a clear indication of parental influence generally, although only nine responses overall indicated the principal would feel no choice but to accept.

Student conduct is where most influence would be allowed with only six feeling they probably would not make the change and over half (24) feeling strongly compelled. Next most susceptible to parental influence was "community involvement in formulation of school objectives," with thirty seven out of forty two at least moderately strongly compelled. Third ranking area for willingness to be influenced by parents was "Recommendations for changes to school buildings." There seems a gap then to "school funds": followed by "methods of instruction" and "teacher assignments." Still, the majority would feel moderately strongly compelled to consider and probably adopt the suggestion on school funds. Only a bare majority would not feel bound to consider and probably adopt suggestions on methods of instruction, and a quarter felt they would make parent suggested changes in teacher assignments more often than not.

Table 19
Parental Influence and Areas of School Activity
Frequency of Responses.

	1 (no choice)	2	3	4	5 (ignore)	N
Objectives	3	17	17	3	2	42
Methods of Instruction	-	6	14	13	9	42
Student Conduct	2	22	11	4	2	41
Teacher Assignments	2	5	4	14	17	42
Buildings	2	14	16	8	2	42
School Funds	0	5	20	12	4	41
Total	9	69	82	54	36	

The significance accorded parental influence is clear. A sizable proportion of principals accept a strong role for parental influence in all areas. Most principals accept it for most areas. Many principals are willing to be guided by parents. The direction of variation amongst school activities is largely as expected, except for school funds. Those activities closest to the professional core and the actual work of teachers are those where fewer principals would accept parental influence. In framing the funds item the researcher had in mind as "school funds" those raised at the school level, largely by parents, and had expected because of this that a right to influence expenditure would be recognized more strongly. It is possible that "school funds" was interpreted to include funds allocated by the district and further investigation may be needed.

Interview And Written Responses. Respondents were asked whether they agreed with the view that parents were influential in only some areas of the school's operations or activities. In some cases there was additional prompting, generally by asking: "Do they, for example, influence staffing." It was clear that a number of the interviewees interpreted the question as a request for their views on what should be, not what is .

Interviewees seemed to be divided on whether parental influence is, and should be, restricted to certain areas. On the one hand was the principal's perhaps traditional view that "parents should act as a support group for the school." Or, as another wrote, "Parents' influence in the schools would relate mainly to housekeeping matters such as cold weather policy, lunches, field trips, etc." On the other hand, a principal claimed, "It's unrealistic to expect parents to try to influence in only some areas," and a teacher said, "They should have a say" in everything.

"You can't tell them to shut up," was a trustee's conclusion from her observation that, "It's difficult to stop them getting into all areas of the school," and she saw an analogy to the board "meddling in day-to-day operations." Two other trustees said much the same and three senior administrators seemed to agree that, as one said, "It's really difficult to draw the line between what they can get into or not." The views of four principals are summed up by one who said, "The degree to which parents exert influence can be controlled and so they can have the opportunity for input to any aspect of the school . . . . It's unrealistic to expect to be able to restrict parents." A principal, writing on the questionnaire, said much the same: "Parents now feel there are no bounds to what they may influence . . . . a principal must consider every suggestion or request even if the answer is no."

"A difference between influence and really running the show," was a teacher's summation of the role of parents, and was echoed by most of the interviewees who also made clear where responsibility for managing parental influence lay. As one principal wrote: "The principal should seek much input but should run the school." The advisory nature of parental influence was stressed -- it should not "coerce" and the principal's aim should not be to "appease", but rather to listen without necessarily accepting. A principal said: "If the principal can fit the advice into the framework within which he operates and accepts it then things are OK." And a senior administrator said, "If they think they're not being heard then the situation becomes volatile."

Those believing parents should be able to exert influence generally were inclined to restrict parents to an advisory rather than directive role, or to confine them to general or policy matters rather than specific individual cases. This latter approach is represented by those who spoke of parents influencing "policy," "quality of education," "the global nature," and "generalities" rather than specific decisions. A trustee spoke of parents' right to influence the "religious program and moral truths." At another stage in the interview a senior administrator said he thought parental influence was stronger in areas where values are important, for example, sex and health education. Similarly, a principal spoke of parents staying out of single teacher/single child relationships.

Interviewees were very much against parents being involved in staffing matters, such as selecting teachers and principals, on the grounds that they had insufficient and perhaps deficient knowledge, lacked qualifications and training, were unacquainted with the overall system perspective, and did not have the professional detachment to make professional decisions. However, three teachers thought parents should have some say in who taught their children.

The phrase"negative influence" was used to describe how parents influence staffing; not through the normal selection processes, but through acting against or for individual principals and teachers. "Petitioning out," as it was described, is not uncommon though not always successful. A principal recounted how his vice principal, who joined the school when he did, was transferred before he "knew what was going on" because the parents were "quick on the draw." A teacher commented, "If parents want, they can just pass a few words around and teachers get transferred." Another principal thought, "Parents can be an asset in influencing higher levels to do something about a weak teacher." "Petitioning in" was used to describe the opposite process -- parents getting a teacher they wanted, and the researcher heard of examples. "Roadblocking" was referred to as the process whereby parents exert influence to forestall an appointment. Examples were given and, in fact, two of the teacher interviewees had experienced unsuccessful attempts to block their own appointments. "Lobbying" was not frequently mentioned though one very experienced interviewee said, "You'd be amazed how much" politics are involved in principal selection. A principal's view also illustrates this "negative" influence: "They can influence staffing because my door is open to them all the time . . . . If they all want their children in another room then you have to look at why."

A few interviewees mentioned evaluation as an area parents should not influence. But in contrast is the senior administrator who said, "Of course they are involved, ipso-facto, in teacher evaluation, as some parent might get cranked up about a staff member and complain -- this could become part of formative evaluation"; and the teacher who wrote, "Where a problem with a student, with curriculum or with the management of a school exists, the concerns of the parent can and do in fact have a great bearing on evaluation."

A third of the interviewees and a number of questionnaire comments would largely exclude parents from curriculum matters because: "The province is in charge of curriculum and that's that"; or, "We as a professional group should do the review"; or, "Parents (are) . . . more concerned about general school operation than curriculum"; or, because they might not appreciate what is involved in "financial and personnel terms" and the "flow."

Only two of interviewees mentioned, "They shouldn't be telling teachers how to teach." However, a principal wrote, "They may raise questions concerning teaching methodology insofar as it affects their child."

Three teachers thought parents should have some voice in who taught their child and a principal described how he had a "thorn in the side" because central office had told him to accept the parents' wishes on a placement.

Some contradictory statements were made about parental influence in discipline, probably because school staff tended to see this as a matter where parental influence should be directed to supporting them in individual cases, while a trustee saw parents involved in establishing the school's policy.

Five of the interviewees and questionnaire respondents indicated that parents have considerable influence in extra-curricular matters, particularly as they may have to finance them and give other assistance.

Five of the interviewees and two questionnaire respondents mentioned fund-raising with the implication that parent involvement in the disposal of the funds constituted influence. A teacher wrote, "Influence increases when they participate in fund raising," and gave examples.

Summary. This analysis of the data gathered on parental influence in different areas of school operations confirms the indications of earlier sections. Parental influence is a significant factor in schools and of importance in virtually any area of school operations. However, there are indications that it is exerted more in some areas than others, and that parents are allowed to influence some areas more than others. Defining these areas is difficult because not only the formal channels of influence have to be considered, but also the informal ones and those, like petitioning, which have achieved a quasi-formal status. The areas that seem most protected or buffered from parental influence are those most directly of concern to teachers -- their allocation of duties and the methods they use in their classrooms. Yet even here, parents are perceived to have some influence or at least a "negative" influence. These indications parallel Stallworth's findings (1982) from a survey of 2000 teachers and 1500 principals in the U.S.A. Respondents favoured more parent involvement but with reservations about curriculum, instruction, administration and governance.

The notion of "negative" influence warrants attention, not least because the word 'negative' conveys an attitude. If parents already exert a recognized and significant "negative" influence there would seem to be a case for turning it into a "positive" influence by opening up these areas to recognized parent participation. For example, it could be argued that allowing parents a formal role in selection of staff for the school might obviate the need for them to exert negative influence, as well as recognizing a right which is currently only grudgingly conceded.

It seems, in view of the growth of parental influence, that trying to confine it in terms of areas of school operations, may be fruitless. This traditional approach is giving way to one that differentiates in various areas between an advisory and a decision-making role for parents, or between concern for the general as opposed to the particular. These approaches imply the need for considerable "managing" of parental influence both to channel it and to ensure other considerations receive due weight and are accepted by the parents. The task of managing or, as some prefer, educating parents is perceived to fall squarely in the domain of the principal.

The findings of this section are incorporated in the following propositions.

Proposition 4. Parents are exerting increasing influence across a wider range of school operations, but the influence is less acceptable to organizational participants in core teaching and personnel matters.

Proposition 5. There is a trend towards acceptance of parents' right to advise on any aspect of school life, particularly at the general policy level, and to make decisions in specified areas of school operations approved by the principal.

Proposition 6. School systems may find advantage in recognizing and legitimizing existing parental influence, particularly with regard to staffing.

Differences Between Parents and Principal

Part II. Principals. Question 7. Are there differences between what you think you should be doing as a principal and what your school's parents think you should be doing?

The results, shown in Table 20, indicate that most principals have differences with parents but they do not occur usually or frequently.

Table 20
Principal and Parent Differences
Frequency and Percentage Responses

Respondent Group	Usually	Frequently	Occasionally	Seldom	Rarely	N
Principal	-	-	22 (52)	17 (41)	3 (7)	42

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

Differences occur infrequently or occasionally, and should be interpreted in conjunction with principals' responses to Question 8, Part I, where 78 percent of principals thought it was important that they accept the wishes of parents when there was disagreement.

In this question, principals were also asked to give examples of matters on which they disagreed with parents. Only eighteen of the forty two did so. Some commented in general terms, for example, that parent input was only advice, or that a small number of complaints would not change policy, or that parents expected too much ("solve all the 'social ills'", for the principal to personally supervise each child, change curriculum dictated by the province). Three mentioned fundraising, but in one case parents wanted more and in another case less. Mentioned twice were field trips, computers in the school, lunch policy, and class placements. Receiving mention once were: discipline policy, bright children, temperature for children to be outside, out-of-class supervision, a reading program, nature of the Christmas celebration, teacher performance and the principal's own teaching load.

The list of examples offers little insight except for its spread across the range of school activities. Those provided are weighted towards the administrative side of the school which might tend to confirm that these are the matters which most interest parents or, alternatively, in which they are allowed to be most interested. None of the principals indicated parents should not have expressed a viewpoint in any of the areas. In total, the impression is that parents influence across the whole range of school activities.

Interview Data. The interviews did not reveal much about the sort of differences that arose between principals and parents. However, serious differences with parents can have serious consequences for the principal. A senior administrator, when asked to name schools with poor parent relations, said he could but it would not be helpful as they all had new principals, presumably because of the previous principal's poor relationships. The potentially serious consequences for the principal were confirmed in asking trustees and senior administrators what happened when a principal lost parent support, though it is clear that cases are not frequent. The senior administrators indicated action might be taken when there were "quite a large number of calls from parents about the school's operation," or "when there were sufficient (complaints) to convince me it isn't my own biases." The consequences were that the matter was "looked at", efforts made at reconciliation, or "some change made." Trustees were not very specific and could only recall a few cases of principals' losing parent support, though one claimed to have been instrumental in having several principals transferred because of parent complaints. No trustee had any doubt that where a principal had lost parental support he had to leave the school ("normally the board would support the parents"), but they were anxious to indicate that there was concern for the principal -- normally an arrangement would be made such as transfer, secondment or sabbatical.

Summary. This section has emphasized the significance of parental influence for the principal. While parents and principals do have important differences in views across a wide range of school activities, the differences do not occur frequently. Parental influence does not extend to dictating to the principal but principals clearly see a need to accommodate parent views. If the differences become too great principals may be penalized. This can be interpreted as pressure on the principal to keep parents satisfied, as expressed in the following proposition.

Proposition 7. Differences in opinion may occur between principals and parents on virtually any matter concerning schools, but such differences do not occur frequently, as there is considerable pressure on principals to accept parental influence.

Boundaries to School's Discretion

This section explores perceptions of the concept of a zone of tolerance or bounded space within which the community allows schools a relatively free hand, as described in Chapter 2. Parents give schools considerable leeway to make decisions but there are boundaries to that leeway which, if crossed, will lead to parental intervention.

Questionnaire Data.

Although no item in the questionnaire dealt with the notion of bounded discretion directly, Question 7 appears to be relevant.

Part I, Question 7. How important is the school's parent community as a constraining influence on principals' discretionary decision-making or freedom of action in their work?

As shown in Table 21, only about a quarter of respondents did not rate parents as an important constraining influence on principals.

Table 21
Parents' Constraining Influence
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	1 (17)	4 (67)	1 (17)	-	6
Senior Administrator	1 (11)	5 (56)	2 (22)	1 (11)	9
Principal	4 (10)	25 (60)	13 (31)	-	42
Teacher	6 (6)	73 (70)	24 (23)	1 (1)	104
Total	12 (8)	107 (67)	40 (25)	2 (1)	161

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

Clearly, most organizational participants think that a principal's freedom of action is significantly constrained by parents. They do set boundaries for what the principal can do. For principals themselves, the proportion was nearer one third, indicating a slightly larger proportion consider they are not constrained, than for the other groups. In view of the earlier reference, in Chapter 3, to preferred locus of control, and the strength of the perception of the other groups, this difference might be queried. Trustees showed the greatest perception of the constraint and one elaborated in writing: "The parent community does constrain the principal . . . . Principals ignore parent influence at their peril."

Interview Data. Question G9 in the interview schedule asked for views on the description of parental influence operating to set broad boundaries for discretion. Subjects were also asked whether parental influence was exerted on specific issues. The question was modified as interviewees seemed more comfortable with the single notion of boundaries within which schools were left free to operate by parents, as described by the "zone of tolerance" metaphor. Essentially, interviewees were asked if boundaries or the zone of tolerance constituted a good description of the actual situation. While the concept was new to interviewees, only a few seemed to have any difficulty grasping it.

Only five of the thirty eight interviewees did not accept the zone of tolerance and bounded discretion description though enthusiasm varied amongst those who did. One senior administrator pointed out, "It's the traditional view of schools -- we established them for a purpose." Of the five who rejected the description, three in their subsequent comments seemed, in fact, to describe the notion. For example, a teacher "didn't see" but added that her pupils' parents were "strong enough to object if they want to." A principal thought it "may be the case for some parents, but not generally," and a trustee thought it might be more appropriate to the public system where the growth of private schools indicated they had breached their boundaries.

Some interviewees put the concept in their own words. A principal said, "A good percentage of parents lets the school carry on as it sees fit. However, when they see some things happening, when their toes are stepped on, they act." Another said, "The key is if you go off the acceptable. You must keep within expectations." A third said, "Parents see the teachers as a professional body, though not quite the same as lawyers and doctors. They're willing to let teachers make decisions within their expertise. But they will step in if there's such things as excessive lack of discipline or over a particular program."

Trustees presented some varied descriptions. "There is a tolerance but also a limit to how far they can stretch it." "Parent influence doesn't have to be obvious -- they don't have to be pounding on the door every day to show they're interested. There are norms and standards and schools are expected to toe the line."

A senior administrator thought, "Plenty of parents do say, 'You're hired to make those sorts of decisions.'" This was echoed by a colleague's comment that, "The bulk . . . are prepared to let the school handle things as long as the school stays within the area of acceptance." A teacher also saw it this way: " A big majority are happy to let the school handle things and if the school is okay they don't want to be bothered."

Some interviewees saw the concept in terms of parents' confidence in the school ~~or~~ system. A senior administrator said, "Parents have confidence that the province and central office are doing their job and that by and large things are okay." A principal said much the same, "No doubt the majority are pleased and satisfied that the school is doing its job . . . . Most accept what's being done at the school." This perception was also that of a teacher: "Most parents take it for granted that the school is doing a good job."

Several principals emphasized that the location of the boundaries depended on communication. "Parents will let you go as far as possible provided they know you're leading." "You still have to communicate what you are doing." "When they are knowledgeable, they accept." The idea is also seen in a senior administrator's comment that, "It all depends on how well the principal informs the community as to what is needed."

Several interviewees pointed out that the boundaries might vary amongst individual parents, amongst schools and amongst communities, and a principal observed that, "The boundaries wouldn't be high or wide for a new person in the school."

Summary. This section has demonstrated most organizational participants perceive parents as an important constraint on principal behavior. The interviewees confirm that the notion of bounded discretion or a zone of tolerance is a reasonable description of the way in which the constraint operates, though this is not a conscious process. Consciousness sets in, for parents, when the boundary or zone is exceeded. This idea helps to explain the high confidence levels in the schools and district evidenced by survey results as noted earlier. The boundaries may vary with individuals, schools and community. Maintaining the boundaries, or expanding them, may be substantially affected by the principal's approach to communicating with parents. The concept also helps to explain the strength of parental influence when it is generally acknowledged that a large majority of parents do not actively participate in attempts to influence schools. Two propositions are drawn from these conclusions.

Proposition 8. The reality for organizational participants is that parents monitor the thresholds or boundaries of the zone of tolerance, and the discretion which the community unconsciously allows schools.

Proposition 9. The boundaries established for a school are not inflexible and they can be altered through the communication skills of the principal.

SUMMARY

This chapter reported on the search for indications of the magnitude of parental influence in the data. Generally, parental influence was deemed to be very significant for schools. Perceptions of the regard staff have for parents' expectations, and of the importance the district should attach to them, plus indications that principals are willing to let parent wishes override their own, confirm the existence and importance of parental influence, as does the perception that there are few differences between schools and parents. There are limits to parental influence, however, as the differences between what schools do and what parents would like them to do, are perceived as important. Few are willing to concede final decision making authority to parents.

Almost without exception respondents perceived that parental influence has grown and the reasons they gave for this suggest it will continue to grow. The data on influence in various areas of school operations, and matters on which parents and principals differ, suggest that while there are vestiges of traditional notions that parents should only be involved with some areas of school operation, parents may be gaining influence in all areas of school operations. Moreover, there seems to be growing recognition of their right to do so. There may be a growing tendency to define the role of parental influence more in terms of advisory or decision making status, and stipulating their legitimate concern as being with general rather than specific operational matters.

Another component of parental influence is evidenced in the perception that it sets the limits within which schools have freedom of action. This helps explain the phenomenon of the majority's alleged lack of interest. Provided the school stays within the acceptable boundaries, most parents do not get involved. Should the school exceed the boundaries, then they become conscious of a problem. All parents may contribute in this way to establishing a zone of tolerance without being aware of their role; active parents may exert influence on particular issues and keep schools aware of the boundaries.

The role of the principal with regard to parental influence emerges from the preliminary general analysis as the critical role. Parental influence is something the principal has to deal with. The principal has to determine which school operations will be open to influence, and how much will be tolerable to other constituencies. At the same time he must retain the support and confidence of parents. Accordingly, the principal has to balance competing influences and often conflicting expectations. Through communication with parents the principal can both maintain the boundaries and expand them.

Nine propositions have been drawn from conclusions reached from the data examined in this chapter.

The following chapter explores more fully the data dealing with perceptions about the role and behavior of the principal.

CHAPTER VII

THE PRINCIPAL AND PARENTAL INFLUENCE

The previous chapter established the significance of parental influence for schools and that this influence is growing. One reason influence is growing is because parents are being encouraged by educators to become involved with and contribute to schools. As the leader of the school, the principal is largely responsible for formulating and implementing policies on parent participation. The discussion of the results with regard to the nature of parental influence contained strong indications that the principal is central to the determination of what functions of the school are influenced and the form of the influence. The principal was also seen as central to the determination with parents of the zone within which the school is free to operate. This central role of the principal is the theme of this chapter. The data are examined for indications of parental influence in principal behavior and for the role the principal plays in regard to parents.

First, perceptions of respondents as to manifestations of parental influence in principal behavior are examined. The examination involves not only principal behavior but also that of the staff whom the principal supervises and leads. Perceptions as to the importance of the principal to the school are the next focus, as it is necessary to establish that influence on the principal has effects for the school. Following this, the data are inspected for indications that the principal mediates parental influence in order to achieve an effective balance with other influences that have to be accommodated. Finally, the chapter cites evidence supporting central propositions of the study: that the principalship is the key to parental influence because of (a) the principal's responsibility for the school, (b) the principal's role as the major determinant of what happens in the school, and (c) the discretion in the role which means that influence on the principal can affect the school.

MANIFESTATIONS OF PARENTAL INFLUENCE

The manifestation of parental influence in the attitudes and behavior or those who are subject to it is an indication of its importance. The previous chapter outlined how parental influence is regarded and treated in the school district. Organizational participants perceive that school staff give importance to parental expectations. The perception is widely shared that it is important for principals to gain, and maintain, parental support. Similarly, it is considered important by over two thirds of respondents for a principal to accede to parental wishes over his own, and a somewhat greater proportion acknowledge that the parent community is an important constraint on the principal's freedom of action. Parent reaction is seen as playing an important part in principals' assessment of curriculum activities and adminstrative practices, and in their decisions on whether to make changes in these areas. The majority of principals in the study acknowledged that they felt at least moderately strongly compelled to consider and more often than not, to accept, parental advice in matters related to student conduct, objectives, buildings and school funds. Over one-quarter of the principals also revealed an openness to parental concern about methods of instruction and teacher assignments.

These findings may be interpreted as manifestations in principal behavior and school activities of parental influence. The purpose of this section is to draw out of the data additional evidence of parental influence on principals as an aid to further understanding of the phenomenom and its impact on school operations.

Questionnaire Data for Principals

Part I. Question 19. What importance is given by principals to demonstrating that their schools have the support of their parent community?

Table 22 demonstrates there is very considerable agreement in the perception of respondents, with some 90 percent considering principals give importance to showing their school is supported by its parents, and half of these gave a rating of "very important."

Table 22

Principals Demonstrating Parent Support
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	3 (50)	3 (50)	-	-	6
Senior Administrator	3 (33)	5 (56)	1 (11)	-	9
Principal	12 (29)	25 (61)	4 (10)	-	41
Teacher	30 (29)	63 (61)	9 (9)	1 (1)	103
Total	48 (30)	96 (60)	14 (9)	1 (1)	159

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

The observation of a trustee, that she had "never heard a principal report that he did not have community support," seems well founded. That principals feel a need to demonstrate parent support, and that they are perceived by others to do so, points to a significant behavioral manifestation of parental influence. If principals feel it is important to them and their work that they demonstrate parents support them, then it seems reasonable to assume they might pursue this objective partly by acceding to the wishes of parents.

Part I.-Question 22. What importance do principals attach to parental complaints about occurrences in the school?

It can be seen from Table 23 that out of 161 respondents only four perceived principals as regarding parental complaints as unimportant. Indeed question 22 had one of the lowest mean ratings on the entire questionnaire. Over half the principals believe they regard parental complaints as very important, surpassing all other groups in this regard. It could be speculated that the lesser tendency of teachers to respond with "very important" might arise from the way principals present parental complaints to them.

Table 23
Principals and Parent Complaints
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	3 (50)	3 (50)	-	-	6
Senior Administrator	4 (44)	4 (44)	1 (11)	-	9
Principal	22 (52)	19 (45)	1 (2)	-	42
Teacher	39 (38)	63 (61)	2 (2)	-	104
Total	68 (42)	89 (55)	4 (3)	-	161

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

A second clear manifestation of parental influence in principal behavior can, if the perceptions are accurate, be seen in principal responses to complaints from parents. Giving such importance to complaints implies those complaints carry considerable weight.

Part I. Question 23. What importance do principals place on resolving, at the school level, problems arising with parents, rather than involving higher levels in the school district?

The strength of the perceptions shown in Table 24 makes clear that principals place very considerable importance on resolving parent problems themselves. This question had the lowest overall mean rating of all questionnaire results with only two principals responding "unimportant" and only two teachers responding "very unimportant." On the other hand, except for senior administrators, responses of "very important" exceeded 70 percent. Obviously, principals are perceived as endeavouring to settle problems with parents without involving their superordinates and consequently their behavior is more likely to be influenced by parents.

Table 24
Resolving Problems at School Level
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	5 (83)	1 (17)	-	-	6
Senior Administrator	5 (56)	4 (44)	-	-	9
Principal	32 (76)	8 (19)	2 (5)	-	42
Teacher	74 (71)	28 (27)	-	2 (2)	104
Total	116 (72)	41 (26)	2 (1)	2 (1)	161

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

There are a number of probable reasons why these perceptions exist. The most obvious, apart from professional idealism, are: to ensure parental support; to forestall superordinates becoming aware of what might be interpreted as shortcomings; and to buffer superordinates from becoming involved with parents.

Part I, Question 24. To what extent do principals regard it as important that their superiors be informed of most problems arising at the school with parents?

The results shown in Table 25 contrast with those for the previous question. This question had one of the highest overall mean ratings for all questionnaire items. Trustees and teachers perceive principals' attitudes towards informing their superiors of parent problems as of lesser importance than the other groups. However, caution ought to be exercised when interpreting these responses as the mean rating is still inclined towards "important", although the percentages incline towards "unimportant." With 70 percent responding with "important" or "very important," principals perceive themselves more as keeping superordinates informed of parent problems. And 55 percent of senior administrators support the perception. Teachers predominantly perceive principals' keeping parent problems from superordinates and trustees perceive this even more.

Table 25
Informing Superiors of Parent Problems
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	-	2 (33)	3 (50)	1 (17)	6
Senior Administrator	1 (11)	4 (44)	4 (44)	-	9
Principal	4 (10)	25 (60)	11 (26)	2 (5)	42
Teacher	5 (5)	37 (37)	55 (55)	4 (4)	101
Total	10 (6)	68 (43)	73 (46)	7 (4)	158

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

The differences among the four respondent groups, shown in Table 25, are among the greatest for any of the tables. Those not involved in the relationship between principal and superordinate responded much differently from those directly involved.

One senior administrator commented that principals do keep him informed for the most part: "I'm not often caught by surprise." Another indicated that at the beginning of the year principals were told that if they wanted to be supported then they had to ensure the superintendent was aware of problems. Six teachers wrote comments. One said it varied amongst principals and two said it depended on the seriousness of the problem, while another wrote: "Depends on what the superiors have asked for, beforehand: i.e. how important is it for principals to follow the guidelines set down, and therefore look good. If the superiors haven't asked for the information then the importance goes to a '3'."

Perhaps the most important insight comes from the differences in responses for questions 23 and 24. There is a strong impression that principal behavior is perceived as giving priority to resolving differences with parents, not only without involving superordinates, but also without informing them of the problems. The implications are that parents have influence if the principal is strongly motivated to resolve their problems and if the principal is motivated to keep those problems from superordinates.

Interview and Written Data for Principals

The questionnaire data have established the manifestation of parental influence in the importance principals give to: demonstrating they have parent support, parent complaints, and resolving parent problems at the school level. This section examines the other data for manifestations of parental influence. First, teacher expectations of the principal in regard to parents are examined, and then principals' reports of the effects on them of parental influence. The questionnaire item on whether principals inform superiors of problems with parents is investigated further and perceptions assessed with regard to the central office buffering role of principals. Finally, the analysis turns to the effects on principals of parents' access to their superordinates.

Teacher Expectations. Responses discussed in Chapter 6 revealed that trustees and senior administrators perceived management of parents as largely the principal's responsibility and an important part of the role. One of the questions asked of teachers was: "What does the principal do?" None of them presented a very full description of the role and there were obvious gaps in all the responses. Six did perceive public, community or parent relations as an important part of principals' work.

Two comments by teachers highlight the two-way nature of the relationship -- accommodating to, but at the same time leading: "Being an exponent of how we can fulfil parent requirements or an educator of parents to change their requirements"; "Selling to parents who must have confidence in the school . . . . The important thing is perception -- parents will do almost anything for you if they feel you are for them -- that the school is doing it for us. If they don't think this there will be all sorts of problems."

Effects Reported by Principals. Principals were not asked how much time they devoted to parent relationships. However, several wrote about the time commitment. "Because of the public involvement in the school, and the school, parent decision-making -- much more of the principal's time is taken into organization and public relations." "Working with a variety of parent wishes -- often contradictory is very time, talent and energy consuming." One principal made clear that the time devoted was rewarded: "Positive parent input and support make for a comfortable school climate and for more exciting programs involving the school community frequently. Consequently the influence on the work behavior of the administrator is one of more positiveness and 'caringness' if there is such a term."

Principal Views on Informing Superiors. Principals were asked: "When do you refer a problem with parents to your superior?" The responses indicate a complex situation about which it is difficult to generalize. First, there is variation according to the individual principal and his experience. Some principals claim to rarely, if ever, contact their superior; for others the superior may complain that they are never off the telephone and cannot make decisions for themselves. Perhaps the most illuminating comment was: "All principals have the problem . . . . You don't want anyone to complain above you. Certain problems you refer, for example, class sizes. In fact you might encourage parents to phone on certain types of problems . . . . You do let the area superintendent know when you think the parent might go to the central office anyway."

While forewarning the superior is motivated in part by making the best of the inevitable ("It's no use covering up until the fire is too hot to put out."), it is also seen by some as a responsiblity : "You have a duty and a responsibility . . . . if a parent phones him about it, then the parent is satisfied the system is involved and on top of the situation -- that's good PR." Another could only describe his decision as "A gut feeling you rely on and you let the area superintendent know right away to prepare and protect him. However, you do try and limit problems going to the central office."

The particular relationship between the superintendent and the principal, whether there is trust, and their comparative experience, were perceived as factors, as was the seriousness of the particular problem. Some take the attitude that "if you've done your best you don't bother "; while in contrast some seek advice "when you've exhausted your own repertoire of solutions and need help."

It might be concluded that maintaining or enhancing an image of competence is only one of a number of motivators for resolving parent problems at the school level.

Buffering Central Office. The relationship of principals with central office was approached in another way. Principals were asked whether they buffered central office against parents. While the concept of buffering involves, potentially, any activity which reduces environmental uncertainty (Thompson, 1976), most interviewees interpreted it as forestalling parents from complaining. Nearly all respondents agreed they do buffer central office. One who did not agree, went on to contradict himself: "Parents come to me first and that is what they should do. I have ticked off parents who went straight to central office." A second claimed, "The parents are welcome to go there and it doesn't upset me," but a third presented a more moderate view: "You hope the parents will give you the opportunity to settle it. I don't discourage them from going to central office -- sometimes it can be healthy -- but it should be resolved at the school level if possible."

The most enthusiastic endorsement of buffering was: "Absolutely . . . .It's a cooperative effort in working toward system goals." Another thought in terms of the principal's autonomy: "You can't have every parent going down there. It's not a matter of protecting them or yourself. The responsibility comes with the job. If you have autonomy, then you should try to deal with it here."

Two principals commented on central office attitudes: "In the past it was a 'no no' to send any parent to the superintendent"; "Central office doesn't like to hear about problems with parents. They like to avoid them." The senior administrators themselves had the attitude that they wanted to be forewarned if they were likely to be involved, but at the same time expected the principals to screen out unnecessary information and make their own decisions (the "weaning" metaphor was used by one).

Parent Access to Trustees. Trustees were asked whether their accessibility to parents affected principal behavior. Some were very definite in their replies. "Principals get very uptight and upset if a trustee contacts them directly on a complaint." "Some principals give the impression that they quake in their boots at the thought of trustees being involved." They "try to head off complaints being taken to trustees. They'd be foolish not to." "They will try and stem complaints -- there is no question that a lot of complaints raises questions about the principal and principals know this." "They're under no misapprehension. Little queries filter down."

Generally, trustees thought principals were, despite trustees' lack of authority over them, quite sensitive to parents' approaching trustees. One described it as "part of a principal's consciousness" and another, as being "in the back of the principal's mind."

Parent Access to Senior Administrators. Senior administrators were also asked if parent access to them affected principal behavior and their comments were similar to those of trustees, although one said: "They're even more aware of parents' access to trustees as that seems to be the fastest route for getting action." Another thought, "It's probably a motivating factor for all of us." Two commented that principals could feel their career prospects were jeopardized by parental complaints: "Principals certainly lose regard if there's too much comes from their school" and "There is such a feeling in schools." More revealing is, perhaps, the comment by a senior administrator that he "tries desperately to assure them that they are informed of all parental contacts." There is significance in another's comment that, "Good principals are very sensitive (to parents going to superiors) . . . . But, of course, they're the ones where parents don't need to."

Summary for Principals

The questionnaire and interview data examined ~~clearly~~ support and extend earlier conclusions about the manifestations of parental influence in principals' behavior. Principals are very concerned with demonstrating they have the support of parents. They attach great importance to resolving problems with parents at the school level without the assistance or knowledge of central office. At the same time, they realize it is necessary that superordinates be kept informed about parent problems which may subsequently require their involvement. Through the eyes of trustees and senior administrators, principals are seen as sensitive to parent access to superordinates and as being under pressure to keep parents satisfied, both in their own self interest and as part of their responsibilities. Teachers expect principals to ensure that parents are supportive. The following propositions bring together the major observations made from the data examined in this section.

Proposition 10. Principals' work behavior reflects considerable effort to demonstrate they have the support of their school's parents.

Proposition 11. Principals are highly responsive to parents, sensitive to parent wishes, and try to keep parents satisfied with their schools.

Proposition 12. Superintendents expect principals to resolve parent problems without superordinates' being involved, and principals see it as in their own interest to do so.

Proposition 13. Teachers expect their principal to manage parents in the interests of the school and teachers' work.

Questionnaire Data for Teachers

Questionnaire items concerning teachers were included in this aspect of the analysis for two reasons. First, there was interest in the extent to which they were affected by parental influence and whether parental influence was associated with aspects of the school other than those directly related to the principal. Second, the researcher was interested in the "middle" role of the principalship in its positioning between teachers and parents.

Part I. Question 27. What importance is attached to the parent community's expectations in selecting staff for a school?

The results for this question, shown in Table 26, had the largest mean of responses in Part I of the questionnaire, for all respondents. The perception of 68 percent of organization participants was that parent expectations are relatively unimportant in selecting staff for a school. However, nearly half the principals and a third of the teachers rated the item as at least important, which indicates that a sizable proportion of those respondents who actually work in the schools believe parents do influence staff selection.

Table 26
Parents and Staff Selection
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	-	1(17)	4 (67)	1 (17)	6
Senior Administrator	-	1 (13)	6 (75)	1 (13)	8
Principal	2 (5)	15 (37)	18 (44)	6 (15)	41
Teacher	2 (2)	29 (29)	48 (48)	22 (22)	101
Total	4 (3)	46 (30)	76 (49)	30 (19)	156

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

On the other hand, only one trustee and one senior administrator considered parent expectations were important in selecting staff for a school. The trustees, if the comment of one is an indication, regret the actuality: "Placing teachers in wrong pew, too bad, but it's a fact."

The district has moved to give principals a greater role in staff selection on the basis that they should be able to choose teachers who will best meet the school's needs. This would allow for more parental influence in the process. As long ago as 1956, Seeley et al. wrote about how a principal built a staff sympathetic to the general tone of the Canadian suburb they studied. However, the plans for principal involvement have been largely thwarted by the requirement to place permanent employees declared redundant in schools with declining enrolments. This was confirmed by a trustee who wrote: "System's needs appear to be more important." And also by a teacher: "Staff selection is often out of the principal's hands and is dictated by economics and who has to be placed." A principal who responded with, "4 unfortunately," and a senior administrator who wrote, "generally, not applicable," seemed to be making the same point.

There are two possible explanations as to why about a third of the school-based respondents perceive parent expectation as important in teacher selection. Despite the restrictions, principals are involved in the process and might reflect parental expectations in their calculation of the school's needs. And interviews showed that some teachers believe that some parents do get the teachers they want appointed to their schools. In fact, two of the nine teacher interviewees had personal experience of such influence.

As a third of all subjects responded with "important," it can be concluded there is a significant body of opinion in schools that parents influence teacher placements. The percentage is over forty for principals and it might be surmised this would rise if principals had less fettered discretion in choosing the teachers they consider meet the needs of the school, since data presented earlier indicated they give importance to parental expectations.

Part I. Question 28. How important is it that a teacher be responsive to the school's parent community?

Table 27 demonstrates there is very little dissent from the view that teachers should be responsive to the parent community.

Table 27
Teacher Responsiveness to Parents
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	3 (50)	3 (50)	-	-	6
Senior Administrator	1 (11)	8 (89)	-	-	9
Principal	15 (37)	25 (61)	1 (2)	-	41
Teacher	26 (25)	72 (70)	5 (5)	-	103
Total	45 (28)	108 (68)	6 (4)	-	159

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

Overall, 28 percent responded "very important," and only six (five teachers and a principal) responded "unimportant."The implication is that teachers are expected to be influenced by parents and to be responsive to them. In other words, parental influence should be manifested in their behavior and, presumably, this attitude is conveyed to teachers largely by the principal.

The results present a contrast to those for question 26. It might be speculated that the perceived emphasis on teacher responsiveness compensates in part for the perceived lack of parental influence in teacher selection.

Part I. Question 29. Of what importance is information from parents in the informal evaluation of teachers?

A teacher responded to this question with "3 I hope." Her hope that parents are unimportant in the informal evaluation of teachers is not confirmed by the results recorded in Table 28.

Table 28
Parents and Teacher Evaluation
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	1 (17)	3 (50)	2 (33)	-	6
Senior Administrator	-	2 (22)	5 (56)	2 (22)	9
Principal	3 (7)	24 (57)	14 (33)	1 (2)	42
Teacher	10 (10)	49 (47)	36 (35)	8 (8)	103
Total 1	4 (9)	78 (49)	57 (36)	11 (7)	160

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

Most teachers (57 percent) and principals (64 percent) consider information from parents does play at least an important part in the informal evaluation of teachers. Though the mean of responses was amongst the highest for the questionnaire, there is still considerable perception of parental influence. The group which perceived the greatest importance was the principals and it is they who have most responsibility for evaluating teachers. As an illustration, a principal wrote, "Unsolicited information is important." Also, a majority of teachers, who are the subjects of the evaluation, saw parent information as being important. In sum, school-based respondents tend to think parents play an important part in teacher evaluation.

Senior administrators differed from the other groups with only two respondents considering parent information is important in informal teacher evaluation. This may reflect their insulation from parental influence and lack of awareness of the realities of schools. It may be due to the phenomenon one senior administrator remarked on -- that central office staff have a limited perspective because their only contacts with parents involve complaints. If the information they get from parents about teachers mainly takes the form of complaints then they may believe that principals are not giving much attention to such complaints.

There could have been some confusion in the question for respondents as the district has only recently instituted a formal teacher evaluation system and informal evaluation is not a much-used concept. However, the fact that there was only one non-respondent does not indicate any problem with the question.

Part I. Question 30. How important is parental dissatisfaction as a reason for transfer of teachers?

A teacher's response was that parental dissatisfaction is an important reason for transfer of teachers but she commented: "I don't think anyone would ever admit to it though." However, Table 29, shows 64 percent of all respondents do acknowledge that dissatisfied parents are influential in having teachers transferred.

Table 29
Parents and Teacher Transfer
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	1 (17)	4 (67)	1 (17)	-	6
Senior Administrator	1 (11)	6 (67)	2 (22)	-	9
Principal	3 (7)	27 (66)	11 (27)	-	41
Teacher	12 (12)	46 (45)	40 (39)	4 (4)	102
Total	17 (11)	83 (53)	54 (34)	4 (2)	158

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

The perceptions of those in the best position to observe the system overall

(trustees, senior administrators and principals) are similar in the large proportions responding with "important" and "very important." Teachers had the largest proportion who did not perceive parent dissatisfaction as important in transfer of teachers (43 percent). This may reflect teachers' lack of awareness of what does happen when parents are dissatisfied with a teacher and the covert manner in which transfers are sometimes arranged.

Parental dissatisfaction is perceived as an important reason for transfer of teachers. Previously this was referred to as "negative influence" and the results here confirm it is a manifestation in school activities of parental influence.

This question provoked more unsolicited written comments (9) than any other. Four were concerned to make the point that parental influence in teacher transfer depended on the nature and seriousness of the problem. This group included the principal who did not respond. Two described the district's recently adopted procedure for dealing with poor teacher performance, with one pointing out it was presently being applied to a teacher against whom parents had petitioned. Another gave a different view on the results of parent dissatisfaction: "Whether the dissatisfaction is justified or not the teacher could probably function better elsewhere if this dissatisfaction spreads community-wide through gossip." Generally, the comments supported the conclusion that parents can have considerable influence.

Interview and Written Data for Teachers

The questionnaire data gave clear indications that parental influence is important because (a) teachers are expected to be responsive to parents, (b) information from parents can be important in teacher evaluation, and (c) parent dissatisfaction can lead to the transfer of teachers. This confirms the impression gained from the analysis of data in regard to parental influence on areas of the school operations -- particularly staffing.

This section continues the analysis by examining interview and written responses. The first focus is teachers' perceptions of the influence of parents on their work. Then their expectations of principals are examined, together with principals' perceptions of their buffering role with regard to teachers. Finally, the perceived role of parents with regard to serious teacher misbehavior is considered.

Work Effects. While most teachers acknowledged that parents affected their work, they were not very explicit about how, although there was little dissent, when it was raised, from the view that a beginning teacher goes through a process of learning-to-get-on-with parents. This process was recently described in a three year ethnographic study of the politics of being a teacher by Blase (1986). He found "learning to play the game" was central to the socialization of teachers and that teachers develop a political perspective for protection against problematic parent relations.

Three of the teachers saw parental influence manifested indirectly through increasing their own motivation. "You know they're demanding and work accordingly. You need that pressure to keep you at it." "They put pressure on teachers to ensure kids excel . . . . They're always checking and evaluating the children." Because parents are in the classroom, "You are on your toes a lot more."

The remaining teachers' responses largely saw parents' influence as more direct and they spoke in terms of the assistance given. Teachers mentioned classroom assistance in making aids, information on the child, discipline of the child, providing the school with "audio-visual equipment, materials and fun things for the pupils," lunch supervision, office help, classroom aide, and library helper.

Expectations of the Principal. While one teacher (the least experienced) said, "He's not there to protect teachers," all the others thought the principal should support the teacher in any conflict with parents, with only some mentioning that the teacher should be blameless. "He should understand the teacher's goals . . . wouldn't expect him to agree with you but he should give support." "The principal should protect and support the teacher. If you've made a mistake he will tell you. If he thinks parents are overstepping the mark he will confront them." "Usually he should stand by the teacher."

Teachers saw a mediating role for the principal who "should get the teacher and parent together to work it out." "To listen to parents but to weight what they have to say with objectivity -- to have a very fair mind." A comment from a questionnaire takes this a little further: "The principal may influence parents to change their views or, at least see and understand a new point of view." An interviewee went even further. While the principal "should be knowledgeable about parent concerns and pass this on to teachers . . . . he should let parents know about the special and good things the staff are doing."

Four of the teachers stressed that the teacher should have the prior right to settle matters with parents directly, with the principal being involved only if this failed. One of them characterized this as a professional approach.

The Principal's View. When principals were asked whether they saw themselves as buffering teachers against parents all except one agreed ("Supports teachers if they're right and, if they're wrong, tells them to apologize."). Some described buffering in terms of preventing an explosion or defusing a situation. "If a parent comes in with a head of steam you try and calm them down. You don't leave the teacher to the wolves." Only a minority claimed they were strictly judicious in deciding whom to support while most acknowledged they had supported teachers even though they thought the teacher was not entirely blameless. One, who said he did not buffer, appeared to contradict himself when he went on to say he would "support them to the hilt. He told staff he would only chastize them if they were really horrible." Another was quite forthright: "Sometimes it can be really tough as some teachers can be a bit of an ass. . . in their way of thinking. You have to collar them afterwards about their mistake." Another considered that "It's a case of walking a tightrope" and he would buffer if he thought "the demand unnecessary or overly demanding or unreasonable."

Serious Teacher Misbehavior. All interviewees were asked about their knowledge of serious teacher misbehavior cases in order to explore their perception of the role of parents. In particular, evidence was sought as to whether parents were responsible for bringing cases to the attention of administrators and whether it was parents who forced action to be taken. Two difficulties were encountered in eliciting responses. The first was with the term "serious teacher misbehavior" which meant little to interviewees and generally had to be explained as "incompetence." Possibly because of the arrangements in the province for dealing with teacher misbehavior, the district itself does not appear to have a disciplinary procedure for misbehavior other than incompetence, which is of relatively recent origins, although cases have been "resolved" in various ways. A trustee could only recall two suspensions in twenty four years and a principal said, "There's no firing of permanent staff." It also became clear that there was a history in the system of avoiding the issue of incompetence by adopting expedients such as transfer or the "dance of the lemons," as one senior administrator is reputed to have described the procedure. However, a senior administrator thought principals were "getting better" and some mentioned the new procedure as being effective. The ways in which misbehavior and incompetence cases have been and are handled meant respondent knowledge was often incomplete.

While incompetence tended to dominate replies, other cases mentioned involved: adultery, alcohol, abusing pupils, bringing unusual or personal religious beliefs into the classroom, absence from class, drugs, and undercutting Catholic philosophy.

The cases cited by trustees all came to attention because of expression of parent concern. A parent phoned to point out "the class was far behind in the curriculum," or "It came from parents who knew the children should not be taught the questions they were asking" or "It came from the parents and I advised them to write to the principal with a copy to the superintendent."

While senior administrators reported that they learned of cases through reports from the principal, most thought parents played a significant part in alerting principals or prompting them to take action. "Through parents phoning. They want their children out of the teacher's class. Parents trigger the action." "The principal gets to know through students, the little things, and definitely parents." As the trustees indicated, there can be by-passing of the principal, and this was illustrated by a senior administrator's comment: "Parents complain as a result of reports by their children. You can't get away with too much. Something occurs in class and goes to one home. They phone each other and soon things are buzzing. The central office has to check."

All principals interviewed were aware of cases of misbehavior, particularly incompetence. There were some clear-cut cases cited in which parents had taken the initiative. One principal described how an assistant principal arrived at the school simultaneously with his own appointment. Parents were forewarned and kept a check on the number of films the assistant was showing and his objectives. As a result he was transferred "Before I knew what was happening." In another case, parents began logging a teacher's absences, forced central office to agree to a permanent substitute, and finally pressured the teacher into leave of absence.

Principals were divided on the role of parents in problem identification. The views of about half of them are represented by statements like these: "You do get alerted by feedback from parents . . . . Parents are not much aware of whether curriculum is being covered but on control and class management they have input. But hopefully the administrator was aware beforehand although he may have been closing his eyes to it." "The principal knows right away when a teacher's no good because the parents don't want their kids in the class." "Students start commenting and then the parents get on to you." On the other hand there were statements like the following: "When a parent calls with a concern over a teacher, ninety-nine point nine percent of the time it is old news to me, unless the teacher is brand new on staff." "If the principal is doing his job he should know." "Your task is to be aware; you should be. It would be embarrassing if a parent had to phone."

Most principals saw a strong role for parents in prompting action. One even expressed gratitude to parents for having done so as it forced central office to act, and another intimated he might encourage parents for this reason. One summed up a case: "The principal may have been aware but action was parent initiated."

Only five of the teachers were aware of cases, and all concerned incompetency. In two, the teachers themselves had been the plaintiffs. One acted partly as a parent in advising other parents to petition central office: "I always tell parents that if they are not satisfied they should band together . . . . They should take action, especially when nothing is happening." The other one commented that in the case of a teacher about whom she complained to the principal, "The parents were coming in droves to keep their kids out of that teacher's class." The other three teachers thought that it was parental complaints which brought action, with one citing two cases resulting in an early retirement and a transfer. "Complaints from parents do force things, as it's true there's a tendency to let things go. Maybe that's why parents think they have to do something."

Summary for Teachers

This section has examined the data for manifestations of parental influence as it relates to teachers. There was little agreement that parent expectations influence selection of teachers for a school but very considerable agreement that teachers should be responsive to parents. Teachers are aware of the influence that parents can have on matters that affect them. Most respondents thought parents influence informal teacher evaluation and the placement of teachers with whom they are dissatisfied. Teachers acknowledge that parents influence their work directly through the assistance they give, their presence in the classroom and their interest in their own children, and indirectly by affecting teacher motivation. As indicated in the previous section, teachers expect principals to manage parents. The manner in which principals do this may determine how much parents influence the core technology of teaching itself. This section has shown teachers expect assistance and support from principals in dealing with parents and principals perceive they give support, even to the extent of defending a weak case. Parental influence is clearly manifested in bringing to the attention of administrators cases of teacher misbehavior and incompetence, and particularly in ensuring something is done about them.

The crucial role of the principal with regard to parents was again brought into relief. Principals are the means through which parent expectations may influence staff selection for the school, and through their work they can ensure teacher responsiveness to parents. They will largely determine the input of parents to teacher evaluation. They can, to a large extent, control the influence of parents on teachers by buffering. Principals must manage influence regarding teacher misbehavior or incompetence and take action to forestall complaints' being taken to their superordinates.

Five propositions summarize these indications from the data.

Proposition 14. Parents exert considerable influence on teachers and their work.

Proposition 15. Principals are becoming more involved in selecting their teachers, partly because principals can be the means through which parent preferences influence the selection process.

Proposition 16. Principals are increasingly concerned with ensuring that staff are responsive to parents.

Proposition 17. Parents play an important informal role in teacher evaluation and this will lead to a more openly recognized role for them.

Proposition 18. The principal largely determines the extent and nature of parental influence on teachers' work and allied matters.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRINCIPALSHIP

If parental influence on principals is an important control then a necessary corollary is that principals are important for schools and that they do make a difference -- an assertion not unchallenged in the literature. Hence, part of the study was concerned with clarifying perceptions about the principals' responsibility for what happens in schools. An associated concern was the discretion principals have in decision making since if they have no discretion their importance is reduced and influence on them may be unproductive. Principal discretion is also, perhaps, the key to understanding how parental influence affects a school. This section deals with documentary and interview data relevant to these two related concerns.

Perceived Importance of the Principal

Documentation. The district's guideline 109.1 (Policy Guideline and Administrative Procedure Handbook), on the role of the principal, states that the principal

> demonstrates through daily actions that he/she works in a collegial manner and exemplifies the qualities that are necessary to fulfill the following expectations:
> - educational leader
> - religious and moral leader
> - manager

This role implies that the principal is fully responsible for all aspects of the school although specifying that he must implement the goals and objectives of the province and district, including the development of a Catholic community. Another guideline (106) is more explicit: "A principal of a school may issue regulations covering the operation of his school provided such regulations are consistent with the School Act, the regulations of the Department of Education, and policies and guidelines approved by the Board." Guideline 416 repeats this but also contains the statement: "The principal is responsible for the operation of the school." Policy 203 makes clear that the principal is fully responsible for evaluation of teacher performance. There seems little doubt, officially, that the principal is of great importance for the school and is fully responsible for it. As a check, trustees and senior administration were asked whether they saw the principal as the central or key figure in the school.

Trustees. The trustees were unanimous in their views about the importance of the principal to the school. "A good school entails a good principal. Once a principal is appointed to a school, it's his or hers." "The principal makes the school." "The principal is the key person, much more so than it used to be."

Senior Administrators. The general view was that a good principal is essential for a good school but some had reservations. Two had no doubts: "As goes the principal, so goes the school."; "A school can't function without a good principal. He's the key." Others would allow of the exception, or that a good principal improves a good school, or that "things can happen without him."

Principals. The question to principals sought their views on whether they were fully responsible for all that happened in the school. Apart from a few disclaimers as to the negligence or contrariness of others, the principals, with one exception, saw themselves as having full responsibility and being in charge: "the way it's supposed to be"; "the bottom line is the principal has to be" (fully responsible); "ultimately responsible." The one principal who did not agree, said he only accepted responsibility for what he did himself.

It was only with prompting that the principals conceded their responsibility was limited in those areas where decisions were made elsewhere: "The local autonomy is within boundaries."

Of importance for the study was the view shared by all principals that parents perceived the principal as fully responsible for the school. "Parents see it that way -- the principal's making the decisions and has the authority." In response to another question, a principal commented that parents expected the principal to personally supervise their child; and for this question a principal commented on the number of parents who came directly to him and not to the teacher.

Teachers. The interviewees nearly all saw the principal as very important to the school and having final responsibility. However, they were more inclined to point out that in practical terms the principal could not be responsible for everything that happens, though two said their principal made the claim to be. "The principal is the key to the whole school"; "Ultimately he does have to answer"; "The principal sets the tone . . . . determines if it's a tight ship and how the kids and teachers behave." One of those expressing some doubt said, "It's in the regulations, but naturally he cannot be, and should not be if teachers are professionals."

Except for one dissenter, teachers thought parents saw the principal as fully responsible for everything in the school and as able to direct it. They cited the proclivity of the parents to take their concerns directly to the principal as grounds for this perception. "Parents probably see him as responsible for everything. I'm afraid that's the image." "Parents do see the principal as the key, as in charge of the school. Parents have the perception that teachers answer to the principal for everything."

Summary. Although some qualified their responses, interviewees' perceptions confirmed the importance of the principal to the school and that the principal is the key to what happens in the school. As trustees expressed no reservations there is some confirmation for the perception of principals and teachers that parents see the principal as fully responsible, in charge of all within the school and, in effect, as the school. Two propositions appear justified.

Proposition 19. The principal is of great importance to, and is responsible for, the school.

Proposition 20. Parents regard the principal as, in effect, the school.

Principal Discretion

Parental influence on principal behavior can only be an effective control over schools if principals make a difference to schools. Principals can make a difference if they have considerable scope for discretionary decision-making or autonomy in their work. That is, they must not be so shackled by prescription that they have no room to accommodate influence. Discretion can be recognized or unrecognized, authorized or assumed.

There is authorized principal discretion in the school system because there has been a deliberate policy of giving principals more autonomy through delegation. In addition to the guidelines cited in the previous section, which allow principals to make regulations, guideline 106 acknowledges that, "It is impossible to document all policies which are operating in the school system because these arise out of decisions by the Board of Trustees, by the actions of individuals within the school system and at the local school level in concert with teachers, parents and students." There is also assumed discretion which was discussed in Chapter 2 under labels such as "creative insubordination." It involves espousing a policy where there is none, breaking rules, bending policies to accommodate problems, and using unapproved means to achieve ends. Some principals, for example, work through parents to achieve their ends when they are unsuccessful through authorized means.

Earlier analyses in Chapter 6 gave indications about principals' discretion. While there may not be many differences between schools and parents, they were perceived as important. Organizational participants saw considerable importance in principals having parental support and most thought parents are an important constraining influence on principals' discretionary decision-making and freedom of action. Support for the proposition that principals should accept the wishes of parents in preference to their own was also strong. Principal discretion has to be seen in the context of these results as well as indications of other controls such as the possible socialization of principals who have worked in the district so long.

Questionnaire Data. All respondents were asked to answer two questions related to principal discretion.

Part I, Question 5. How important is it for principals to have autonomy, that is, discretion to do their job as they see fit?

As Table 30 makes clear, there is a very strong perception for all groups that principals should have autonomy. Only ten respondents answered with "unimportant." Ninety four percent thought it was important for principals to have discretion to do their job as they saw fit. Principals and trustees see autonomy as of greatest importance and senior administrators, perhaps as expected, have the highest group mean, though the differences are small. This strong expression of the importance of allowing principals discretion implies that the concept has wide acceptance in the district. A comment written by a senior administrator was: "System does try to push autonomy down to principals but wouldn't say they necessarily have the resources to make it effective or that principals take all they're offered."

Table 30
Principal Autonomy
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	3 (50)	3 (50)	-	-	6
Senior Administrator	2 (22)	6 (67)	1 (11)	-	9
Principal	22 (52)	19 (45)	1 (2)	-	42
Teacher	37 (36)	59 (57)	8 (8)	-	104
Total	64 (40)	87 (54)	10 (6)	-	161

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

Part II. Trustees Question 4. Senior Administrators Question 3. Teachers Question 4. Are principals free, within policy, to administer schools as they see fit?

Part II. Principals Question 4. Do you feel that the school district administration allows you sufficient discretion to do your job as you see fit?

The results in Table 31 very strongly support a conclusion that organizational participants perceive principals as having very considerable discretion -- they are seen as "frequently" or "usually" free, within policy, to administer schools as they see fit.

Teachers as a group perceive less discretion for principals than trustees or senior administrators, possibly because part of the role of the principal is to ensure teachers conform to the principal's interpretation of what is required by the district and province. Principals, as a group, perceive themselves as having slightly more discretion than teachers perceive them having but not as much as the trustees and senior administrators consider principals have. That five out of six trustees answered "usually" is consistent with a perception amongst parents of the importance and power of the principal.

Table 31
Principal Discretion
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Usually	Frequently	Occasionally	Seldom	Rarely	N
Trustee	5 (83)	1 (17)	-	-	-	6
Senior Administrator	6 (67)	3 (33)	-	-	-	9
Principal	28 (67)	9 (21)	5 (12)	-	-	42
Teacher	49 (47)	41 (39)	13 (13)	1 (1)	-	104

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

Interview Data. While their comments supported the questionnaire results, trustees did make the point that it was circumscribed discretion: "They must toe the line on policy and recognize the power of the system. In one case an area superintendent had to visit a particular principal and twist his arm till he disappeared." "They have a lot of discretionary authority. Most are happy they don't have it in some areas -- they can pass the buck. But they have enough discretion to make the school their own."

Because of time constraints, principal discretion was not raised directly with senior administrators. However, in their remarks about their own influence over principals they drew a line between mandated matters with which principals must comply, and matters where superordinates had to use other techniques to get principals to do what is wanted. Comments indicated a good deal of variety in principal autonomy depending, as one area superintendent said, "On the time, the experience of the principal, the needs of the situation." Another commented that "Some are stronger than their superintendents and don't get tackled."

The teacher interviews supported the questionnaire results as interviewees generally thought principals had a "fairly free hand to run the school." But they did tend to qualify answers: "As long as things are going well, downtown's happy"; "Provided what he does is a reasonable thing and he can justify it"; "He has boundaries and has to work within them."

When asked whether principals had enough discretion, teachers were not confident in their answers. Two mentioned the principal's restricted influence in staff selection, and one said, "He has to get along with his staff too." Lack of confidence in responding is explained by the comment of one teacher: "I don't know what powers the principal does have. Teachers are too busy running their own classrooms." These responses are in line with Schwartz's finding (1980), with Canadian inner-city schools, that few teachers were aware of the school system matters to which their principal devoted so much time and effort.

The principal interviewees generally did not perceive they were restricted in their discretion and felt they could discharge their full responsibility for the school.

Representative comments were: "Sometimes I think I have too much discretion and autonomy and I don't know where I would like more."; "The controls are not stifling and you do feel you're running the school."; "A principal fairly well acts as he wants to." They were aware of restrictions though: "The system doesn't always allow the principal to be fully responsible." Staff, finance and other resources were mentioned as restricting discretion and one said, "A lot of stuff is handed down to us and we just facilitate." Another saw this as something of an advantage: "The principal has to explain why and it's to his advantage to be able to say he's limited in what he can do."

Summary. This section has highlighted evidence from the data for the perceived importance of principal discretion and of considerable autonomy. Generally, principals feel they have enough discretion to fulfil their responsibilities. As discussed in Chapter 2, however, there are limits to their discretion as they are supervized, directed, limited in their resources, monitored for output, and chosen and socialized to improve the likelihood of their making acceptable decisions. In addition, the earlier analysis of results has pointed to the significance of parents as a control.

It would seem that principals have considerable autonomy and its dimensions are not an issue in the district. Given such discretion, parental influence on the principal is not misplaced, and attention to parents as a means of controlling principals is justified. Two propositions express these conclusions.

Proposition 21. Principals have very considerable discretion in doing their job, though they are subject to various controls including parental influence.

Proposition 22. The amount of discretion principals have means that parental influence on principals can significantly affect schools.

Principal Support for Superordinates

A focus of the study has been the crucial positioning of the principalship at the interface between school and parents and this has been explored at length in the data analysis. However, the principal is also positioned at the interface between superordinates and parents. The principal is the local representative of both the district and the province, from both of which come authority and direction. The communication role of the principal emerged several times in the analysis as being critical for gaining parent acceptance for what the school does. Perceptions of the principal's role in promoting with parents the policies of the district and province were explored through the questionnaire. In interviews with principals, an attempt was made to ascertain the degree to which they actively supported these policies or exercised discretion.

Questionnaire Data. Two questions from Part I are relevant.

Part I, Question 25. What importance do principals place on promoting parental support for School District policies?

The overall results contained in Table 32 yield a strong perception that principals do promote parental support for district policies.

Table 32
Principal Promotion of District Policies
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	1 (17)	2 (33)	3 (50)	-	6
Senior Administrator	1 (11)	4 (44)	4 (44)	-	9
Principal	7 (17)	31 (74)	4 (10)	-	42
Teacher	12 (12)	64 (64)	22 (22)	2 (2)	100
Total	21 (13)	101 (64)	33 (21)	2 (1)	157

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

The perception of promoting support is strongest for principals themselves, followed by the teachers, while senior administrators and trustees tend to perceive less support. Principals see themselves as performing a role function of enlisting parent support for district policies and teachers strongly incline towards agreement with this perception. Trustees and senior administrators do not perceive as much support from principals. The low use of "very important" as a response has implications for the district if it is accepted that principals are the main vehicle for communication with parents.

Part I. Question 26. What importance do principals place on promoting parental support for Alberta Education policies?

The aggregated responses reported in Table 33 show a small majority of respondents consider principals give importance to promoting parental support for provincial education policies.

Table 33
Principal Promotion of Provincial Policies
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	-	1 (17)	4 (67)	1 (17)	6
Senior Administrator	-	4 (44)	4 (44)	1 (11)	9
Principal	5 (12)	22 (52)	14 (33)	1 (2)	42
Teacher	4 (4)	55 (55)	35 (35)	7 (7)	101
Total	9 (6)	82 (52)	57 (36)	10 (6)	158

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

The differences amongst the groups are similar to those for the previous question. Principals, as a group, think they give more importance than the others perceive. Teachers are closest to principals in their perceptions. The differences from the results concerning district policies are probably explained by interview comments about the remoteness of the education department and reliance on the district for interpreting provincial policies. The perceptions of trustees and senior administrators may be influenced by a belief that schools should not relate directly to the province.

Interview Data. Principals were asked whether they gave unqualified support to district and provincial policies. Their strong perception was that they do though there were some indications of a willingness to exercise discretion. There did not seem to be much appreciation of the inadequacies of general policies as prescriptions for behavior and it is possible there are transgressions without principals being aware they have not complied. For example, the researcher saw the intrusion of trustee elections into the schools on a number of occasions.

Eight of the thirteen principals said they gave unqualified support to Board policies and pointed out they were employees and felt bound. If they disagreed with a policy they pursued change through the proper channels. Others were not quite so sure that they gave unqualified support: "I didn't say I wouldn't forget about a policy in some situations."; "Perhaps, on occasion, I could be inclined to ignore."; "I interpret a little. I do close my eyes to some."; "From an operational perspective, there is much I can do within the spirit of policy by way of discretionary action . . . . Policy shouldn't be hanging over your head; it shouldn't be a stick over you in a negative sense. Policy should be framed to 'assist' the principal in making difficult decisions and to ensure some 'consistency' in the system."

Responses from the principals were much the same with regard to provincial policies but it was pointed out a number of times that principals had little direct contact with the provincial department and relied on the district to advise them of requirements. The district takes precedence over the province when principals look for guidance. There were some indications of a willingness to be flexible: "At times . . . you may conveniently forget it"; "You have to put policy into practice"; "Ignore some of the things that come from them -- minor, housekeeping things are a nuisance."

Although they had claimed little direct interaction, there was still considerable criticism of the provincial department because of its remoteness and the impracticality of its demands at times. One principal made an insightful remark: "They (the Department) don't think out an idea and then hide their responsibility behind talk of autonomy." These attitudes perhaps reflect the district's problems as an agent of the province.

Summary. Organizational participants perceive that principals promote parental support for district and provincial policies, though a sizable proportion did not agree, particularly in regard to provincial policies. A larger percentage of principals perceived themselves as being proactive in support of superordinates' policies than for the other groups. Teachers were nearest to principals in their perceptions. Superordinates may feel they receive less support from school-based personnel than the latter consider they give.

There was only limited recognition of assumed discretion by principals in implementing superordinate policies. However, exercise of assumed discretion is not always recognized as such, and the less specific a policy is, the more scope there is for believing a particular interpretation is legitimate. Comments reported elsewhere in the data indicate, as one former trustee and senior administrator said, that "principals can be a law unto themselves."

Two propositions are derived from these findings.

Proposition 23. Part of the principal's role is to promote parent support for superordinates' policies.

Proposition 24. Principals are frequently unaware of their potential discretionary power and they probably exercise discretion more than they realise.

THE PERSON IN THE MIDDLE

A strong element in the conceptualization of the study was a view of the principalship as located at the critical juncture of staff, parent and district interests. The principal has to achieve a balance amongst these interests, so that all are satisfied or at least not dissatisfied enough to cause problems, and the school can operate harmoniously with most energies devoted to pursuit of its objectives. The interviewees were asked what they thought of the description of the principal as the man or woman in the middle, between teachers and parents, between teachers and the district, between parents and the district. Two thirds of all interviewees agreed with the description or concept while a few were ambivalent about it, and eight disagreed.

Trustees

The one trustee who did not view the principal as in the middle thought the description implied conflict whereas the groups should complement each other and "recognize the positives in working together." Other trustees recognized the conflicts were there and that resolving them was the job of the principal. "It comes with the turf. There are always conflicts and pressures and he has to have a thick hide, or skin, and the constitution for pressures." Another spoke of the "enormous expectations of principals" deriving from their role statement, while a third commented: "Some are concerned only with keeping the teachers happy. For others, the kid is king." One described how a parent advisory committee might be concerned with "a touchy issue" and expect support from the principal who has to tell them he can only pass on their advice: "But they want to drag the principal along and put him in the position of being practically insubordinate . . . . The principal is supposed to be the impartial judge but parents push him to support them and, if he doesn't, may blackball him. One principal had to be sent a note of reprimand with a reminder he wasn't there to push for the PAC."

Senior Administrators

While not all senior administrators accepted the description of the principal's role, nearly all the comments were illustrative of it. One who dissented said principals are "On the top . . . . If they wish they can get parents to believe, think and feel whatever they want." And another said the principal "Is very much on the front line with parents. He has to make the decisions on their concerns and deal with the issues involving the community." One who didn't fully subscribe to the description said, "They simply exist to facilitate what happens in" the teacher/child/ classroom relationship.

Those who agreed with the description said: "Normally he's the mediator caught in the middle as he has to stick up for his colleagues."; "That's what leadership is all about"; "At times there is conflict. But it depends on the relationship that is established with parents"; "Some operate on the idea 'we're all together" while others blame 'those guys downtown'." The "split grades" issue was quoted as a "perfect example" of the principal in the middle and one respondent pointed out, "One principal might try to pacify the parents," while another "might organize the teachers and parents to go to the Board." On his questionnaire a senior administrator wrote of schools where the parent advisory committee might try to be "Stronger than advisory . . . when it is allowed . . . . calling on trustees to deal with concerns about a school operation or program." He went on to say that "Principals in these schools walk a delicate tightrope and unless the principal is a politician, parental influence can be very effective -- to the point of suggesting changes in administration."

Principals

Four principals did not see themselves in the middle. Three saw the situation in strict hierarchical terms. As one put it: "He's on the other side -- the representative of central office who has internalized their values -- you've been forced to make a choice." But all three referred, in describing their job, to activities implied in the "middle" description: "You hope that you can convince parents and teachers to appreciate central office objectives and goals"; "Central office provides the resources and I get cooperation from teachers and parents"; "One of his jobs is to mediate. He has to ensure parents and teachers work cooperatively and if they don't he sometimes has to intervene." The fourth talked of principal and staff being one team.

Similarly, a principal who did not fully accept the description went on to talk about its being "unreasonable if the senior administration was getting calls from parents at every school." He said he was not in the middle with teachers but, if the parent wished, he would sit in on the teacher conference, and he described how at times teachers had to be protected as they were "simply doing what the principal or externals expect."

The other eight principals agreed readily but with some qualification at times. Several described their role as a buffer between the groups and one said, "The arrows go through you -- front back and sideways." He described the situation as, "There're so many people you are responsible to," and the dilemma of teaching parents pressure tactics they might eventually "use against you and the teachers." A principal wrote of "a sort of 'catch 22' -- either you have the school board on your back or you don't please the parents." On the questionnaire a principal wrote a long description of functioning in the middle as the principal had to listen to parents; weigh the value of what they wanted; assess it against the goals of the province, system, school and community; decide if it was good for the children; and ensure it did not make unrealistic demands on teachers.

Teachers

The teacher who did not agree with the description added; "But then I don't know what goes on when the door is closed; I'm just a classroom teacher." The others were quite definite: "He has to be many things -- a real juggler" ; "How do you please everyone?"; "You need to have good shoulders and not be concerned by criticism"; "He's often in the line of fire from all angles."

Six teachers' written comments from the questionnaire described the role of the principal in terms which accord with the "middle" description. Selected examples follow. "We felt certain decisions should have initially been made as a staff and not come to us from the parents. The principal was then caught in the middle." "Sometimes principals are coerced into making decisions because of parent demands and expectations in areas where the staff and administration would have chosen to do something differently." "Principals suffer these pressures and demands and must continually be prepared." "Our principal . . . . knows how to 'weight' their input and run his school; rather than having it run by parents." "When do you perceive parental involvement as concerned, and when is it downright meddling? How does a principal distinguish between the two?"

Summary

The near unanimity of opinion amongst interviewees, supplemented by written comments, leads to the conclusion that the principal is perceived as the person in the middle who has to reconcile the interests of superordinates, teachers and parents.

Some saw the principal as more aligned with one interest, for example, the hierarchy or teachers, but they still recognized that the principal had to get the cooperation of others. Few examples were given of a principal being aligned with parents but there is always the possibility of a principal presenting different faces to different groups. A teacher described a previous principal and how staff had left the school because he sided with parents. Two trustees commented in derogatory terms on principals who sided with parents, or used parents to pressure the board, and a case was mentioned where a principal was removed because he could not control parents.

The principalship is a role performed where major constituencies of the school interface. It carries the responsibility for achieving a balance amongst teachers, superordinates and parents which furthers the interests of the school and its students, as expressed in the following proposition.

Proposition 25. A major function of the principalship is to reconcile the interests of superordinates, teachers and parents in order to establish the balance which is best for achievement of school objectives.

THE PRINCIPAL AS THE KEY TO PARENTAL INFLUENCE

A clearly emerging theme from the interviews and many questionnaire comments was that the individual principal played the key role with regard to parental influence. The district places responsibility for managing parents on the principal. It is the principal who is largely responsible for promoting parent interest in the school, and for parents' being organized. Parental influence is largely focussed on the principal whom parents see as the school. The principal acts as the gatekeeper for the school and largely decides whether parents will influence the school and to what extent. The principal provides leadership for parents, channels parental influence and determines what areas of school operations will be affected. The principal placates or re-educates parents when their wishes cannot be met. When necessary, the principal may have to persuade staff, and even superordinates, to accept parent wishes. The principal may mould parental influence and control it through manipulation of information, convincing parents of what is worth pursuing and drawing them away from the unacceptable. It follows that the capabilities and dispositions of the individual principal are very often the crucial determinants of parental influence on a school. Not only do parents influence the principal but the principal influences parents.

Too many apt quotations were assembled for full recording here, but some illustrative ones follow. They are assembled under categories drawn from the previous paragraph as themes worth pursuing, but do not represent a definitive listing.

Arousing Interest

Trustee: "Some principals are 'right there' -- they listen to parents and get them interested."

Senior Administrator: "The involvement of parents anywhere depends to a large extent on the particular principal."

Principal: "You can get parental involvement in any school if the principal tries."

Teacher: "The parents in our school, and the principal as well, are not very vocal."

Organizing

Trustee: "PACs do have influence and with a good principal they work very hard."

Senior Administrator: "Parent organizations are the responsibility of the principal who can make or break them."

Principal: "Some only go through the motions. They elect a PAC but it never meets. It depends very much on the personality of the administrator."

Teacher: "The parents at this school had a principal who made them feel important, that their input was important. A change of administrators brought a different personality ."

Gatekeeping

Trustee: "The only areas where parents lack influence . . . are those where the principal feels they are not qualified."

Senior Administrator: "Parent influence or 'the effect therof' is also a function of the particular school administrator, teacher! Personality , approach, ability to communicate and, above all, the confidence of the individual all have a direct effect on the impact of parents."

Principal: "If you know the parents you also know if you want to be influenced by them."

Teacher: "Some (principals) are affected more by parent pressure than others. Some bend to pressure, some do not."

Leadership

Trustee: "The Principal must articulate and take in the community, interweaving it into the positive."

Senior Administrator: "In some cases there is real involvement but in others it's simply co-opting the parents. It varies from principal to principal." Or, "It all depends on how well the principal informs the community as to what is needed."

Principal: "Quite often it is more important for the principal to sell his objectives, goals and ideas to the parents, for support."

Teacher: "I'm not sure whether the pyramid leans one way or the other -- whether there is extreme influence by parents or whether the administration sells parents on what it wants to do."

Capabilities

Trustee: "A lot of schools reflect the way the principal does things."

Senior Administrator: "It all depends so much on the principal. Some like to take advice, some don't."

Principal: "Some administrators feel that getting information from the public represents a challenge to them -- they take it personally instead of trying to work out a solution -- some feel threatened."

Teacher: "The above type of staff creates an atmosphere of openness to parental input and can tell parents why their suggestions were not implemented with tact and diplomacy, avoiding hostility and confrontations . . . . The above qualities in teachers are most essential for the principal."

Summary

The principal's capabilities largely determine how parents' potential for influence on the school is realized. Principals may create parental influence by arousing parents' interest. They may stimulate parents to organize so that they are influential. They determine where, when and how parents influence the school and they can lead parents. As much as parents may influence a school through the principal, they may themselves be influenced by the principal. It is an interaction relationship rather than a simple one-way process. The importance of the principal's role with regard to parental influence is expressed in two propositions.

Proposition 26. The principal decides how much and what influence parents will have in the school.

Proposition 27. The parent-principal relationship is interactive with each influencing the other.

SUMMARY

This chapter has established from the data that principal behavior is strongly influenced by parents and that, conversely, parental influence is shaped by principal role performance. This interactive relationship has significant consequences for the school. Parental influence is manifested in the behavior of principals and the teachers for whom they are responsible. Principals do largely determine the nature of schools and they have sufficient discretion for their behavior to affect the school in significant ways. Parental influence on them can affect their schools. The principalship occupies a critical middle position amongst teachers, parents and superordinates and a major function of the principal is to establish an appropriate balance of influence for these constituencies.

The major findings associated with these conclusions have been expressed as seventeen propositions, numbers ten to twenty seven.

Chapter VI established that parental influence is a control on principal behavior. This chapter examined the control with a focus on the principal. The next chapter focuses on superordinates and their relationship to the control with the object of determining whether the control mechanism is fostered by superordinates so that it is, in effect, part of the school system's means of principal control.

CHAPTER VIII

SUPERORDINATES AND PARENTAL INFLUENCE

Chapter VII focussed on the principal and parental influence and drew attention to the demands on the principalship resulting from its positioning between parents and superordinates. In this chapter further data are examined for indications of parental influence as an environmental control mechanism, with the focus being the principal's superordinates.

While the existence of parental influence as an environmental control has been established, perceptions as to a link with the school system's control of principals has not. This is the first concern of the chapter and is followed by analysis of the data to ascertain if and how superordinates, or the school system, promote and facilitate parental influence on principals. Direct and indirect means are examined, including the district's reward system for staff. Respondents were not familiar with the concept of parents as a control and tended to interpret it as manipulation rather than as simply part of a complex web of checks and balances similar to those governing most societal functions. In order to be a control, parental influence does not have to be explicitly recognized as such.

No attempt is made to explicitly define "superordinates" -- they are those central office staff ranking above principals (including trustees), though only some have a conventional line relationship to principals. "Superordinates" is used in the same sense as the personified "district" or "system" or "central office" are used by organizational participants. As the jurisdiction is a creature of the provincial government (Bergen,1975:27), the province may also be seen as a superordinate.

THE MECHANISM AND SUPERORDINATE ATTITUDES

The concept of parental influence as an environmental control mechanism forming part of a school system's web of controls over principal behavior was introduced in Chapter I. This section examines responses to the questionnaire items on the mechanism and to the interview questions concerning superordinates' attitudes towards parental influence.

The Mechanism

Questionnaire Data. Only one question in the questionnaire specifically asked for perceptions of the control mechanism, partly because of the difficulty in framing alternative questions. However, question 12, described later in this chapter in reference to indirect superordinate influence on principals, might be construed as asking for similar responses and supporting conclusions from question 11.

Part I, Question 11. How important are parental expectations as a means through which your school district administration influences principals?

Table 34 shows that 66 percent of all respondents thought parental expectations were an important means through which the school system influences principals. And 22 percent thought it was a very important means. There is a very strong overall perception that the school district uses parental expectations as a control over principal behavior. The result is consistent with the findings already derived for a number of questions, but particularly question 4, where the importance of principals' having parental support in the district was established.

Senior administrators' mean response differs a little from the other three groups which are very similar. While trustees, principals and teachers strongly perceive principals controlled in this way, fewer senior administrators recognize the mechanism. This difference may support the claim of one senior administrator that central office has a relatively poor understanding of the realities of parent involvement.

Table34
Parent Expectations and Control
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	1 (17)	5 (83)	-	-	6
Senior Administrator	-	7 (78)	2 (22)	-	9
Principal	11 (26)	25 (60)	6 (14)	-	4
Teacher	23 (22)	68 (66)	11 (11)	1 (1)	103
Total	35 (22)	105 (66)	19 (12)	1 (1)	160

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

Interview Data. Asking interviewees whether the school system used parental influence to control principals did not elicit much information as the idea was not easily grasped, or accepted. Respondents tended to think in terms of manipulation. So the question was altered to asking about how the system encouraged principals to be responsive to parents.

When senior administrators were asked how they influenced principals, or got them to do what they wanted, there was no mention of parents. They spoke of the "mandating" certain matters, of holding principals "accountable for results," of involving them so they "owned system goals" and became partners, of "table hospitality," of "sharing information," of "piloting and modelling," of "discussing," and of meeting principals' needs. The lack of recognition of the mechanism may be because parental influence is a general system control rather than being relevant to an immediate task. That is, it is something to be taken into account by the principal as a basic frame of reference rather than being consciously applied by a superordinate to a particular problem.

Superordinate Attitudes

Questionnaire Data. Earlier analysis of the responses, such as those presented in Tables 10 and11, revealed a very strong atmosphere favouring parental influence in the district. The responses to the question 6 confirm that impression.

Part I Question 6. What importance does your school district's administration place on the schools' being responsive to their parents?

The results shown in Table 35 give some of the smallest means for the questionnaire, which might indicate very strong perceptions that the district puts great store on responsiveness to parents. However, further statistical analysis would be necessary for a firm conclusion.

Table 35
District Emphasis on Responsiveness
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	4 (67)	2 (33)	-	-	6
Senior Administrator	5 (56)	3 (33)	1 (11)	-	9
Principal	27 (64)	15 (36)	-	-	42
Teacher	46 (45)	57 (55)	_	_	103
Total	82 (51)	77 (48)	1 (1)	-	160

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

Of all respondents, only one senior administrator did not agree that the district regarded responsiveness to parents as at least important, and the number recording "very important" was just over half. Principals perceive a very strong district attitude and seem to have little doubt of what is expected. The lower proportion of teachers responding with "very important" may reflect buffering of teachers against system expectations by the principal.

Interviews : District Attitudes. While interviewees found it difficult to identify policies or documents which conveyed or expressed a district attitude to parental influence on schools, they were virtually unanimous in perceiving that the district encouraged and supported it, thus confirming the questionnaire results. There were a few references to the pamphlet on "School Parent Advisory Committees." Many qualified their perception of district policy and, particularly at the lower organizational levels, there was some cynicism about the district's matching its words with actions.

Strongest perceptions of district attitudes favourable to parental influence came from trustees: "Board policy is to 'knit' community expectations and the principal"; "The cornerstone of any system"; principals are "required to be involved with the parent group . . . .have the responsibility to communicate with parents"; the mission statement requires that "schools reflect the wishes of parents"; post Vatican II thinking requires a move from "highly structured, vertical centralization to lay leadership."

Most senior administrators thought it was well "understood" through an "unwritten policy" and "plenty of practice" that the district encouraged parental influence on schools. They tended to think mainly in terms of PACs and, as one with extensive experience as a principal said, did little to encourage it on a "day-to-day basis." There were several observations that the influence must only be 'advisory' and some querying whether PACs really represented most parents. The district's survey of parent attitudes was mentioned to demonstrate parent satisfaction and there were a few references to parents' ultimate electoral power over boards.

Principals, reflecting the questionnaire results in Table 35, unanimously thought the district encouraged and promoted parent involvement and opportunities for parents to influence the school. ." (The) message is that principals should work very much with parents, keep them in the picture, and know their needs and feelings so that problems are prevented from occurring"; "The district does everything possible to encourage involvement"; there is a "definite expectation of parental involvement and of a prominent role for them in school operations."

Probably because of the current emphasis in the district on convincing the public of the value of the schools, responses often referred to 'marketing' and the special role of the communications officer in promoting parent involvement. Some referred to system-wide language committees as the district setting an example of consultation with parents for the schools. Others said they were told at meetings that the district wanted parents involved. Some referred to more subtle ways in which the district made its attitude known: "Always responds to parent concerns . . . . they always phone when they've heard from parents. They are responding more and more . . . . they don't want the matter taken further so that there is bad publicity."

Several principals explained the absence of explicit policy on parental influence in terms of the potential conflict with another major policy -- principal or school autonomy. "Each school decides how it will implement." "They generally leave it up to the individual administrator because they're semi-autonomous." Apparently principals are well aware of the District's attitude that parents should influence the school and of the autonomy the district gives them. Achieving balance for a particular school is a task for the principal who must decide whether to limit his own discretion, and when, for example, to encourage formation of a PAC and other means for parents to influence the school. One principal expressed this: "The district wants follow-up on parent concerns and questions and to ensure that when principals make a decision they look at the interests of the school, the staff, and the students, and at the system guidelines." Another principal, writing on the questionnaire, expressed the conflict that can arise for the principal:

> Parental/staff opinion is often overridden by Senior Administration . . . . (which) is 'less flexible' to parental input . .

> . . Senior Admin appears to be 'intimidating' when approached by parents. In relation to parents Senior Admin. does not practise what they preach. They advise principals to consult but under pressure avoid the input they receive. Parents influence principal. Principal influences staff and parents. Senior Admin. are either neutral or have negative effect. They very rarely produce positive change unless the principal is having trouble in the community.

Consistent with the results for item six from the questionnaire, all teachers thought the system favoured parental influence but some questioned its consistency. One seemed to think it was more of an election time phenomenon, while another said "they" must favour it because "they" supported the early childhood articulation project, and a third thought the District's attitude was "Sort of mediocre; they don't stress it. As a system it isn't pushed." Two were concerned about the system's attitude. One said the district wanted "To keep parents happy. They don't take a stand, they want to smooth things over, and this way nothing is ever really resolved." The other thought "They are afraid of parents. The verdict in a dispute always goes to parents and against administration and teachers. They look for peace at any cost and will transfer teachers."

Interviews - Provincial Attitudes. On the whole, interviewees said they thought the provincial education department encouraged and supported parental influence in a similar fashion to the district. However, they were less certain in their comments and sometimes said they did not know. The reasons seem to be simply that teachers do not look much farther than the school for the information they need and principals look to the district.

All trustees perceived provincial support for parental influence. Examples given were attempts to get public involvement in the Secondary Education Review, funding for and consultation with the provincial Home and School Federation, and the emphasis on 'partnership' as background to the proposed new school act (Alberta Education,1985a). One thought boards were required "to have provision for it"; while another said, "The minister certainly reacts to complaints and channels them down to the board pretty fast," and a third claimed the minister had dealt directly with parent groups without referring them back to their board.

Senior administrators thought the province was "supportive and positive" about parental influence and several thought the province wanted it to increase. There were references to the partnership concept, to the Secondary Education Review, and two said that the province's early childhood policy was "built around" parental influence. There were two expressions of doubt as to whether the actions of the province demonstrated their sincerity. For example, one thought the decisions on secondary education had probably been made before the public was asked to comment.

Although all principals said the province supported school responsiveness to parents, their perceptions ranged from "very much" to "tokenism" and "window dressing". Most were not very certain about provincial policies, for as one said, "We get policy from the board and don't know the influences on them." There was mention of 'partnership' and the Secondary Education Review. Almost half referred to early childhood, one critically because the local advisory committee (LAC) acted autonomously within the school and because of the danger that parent expectations for influence would not be met as children moved into grade 1. The acting director of early childhood services in the provincial education department confirmed this was a concern of principals elsewhere, but considered it unfounded as they can control early childhood, albeit with parent participation and involvement.

Four teachers said they did not know what provincial policies were and the others' responses were sometimes vague. Two mentioned early childhood: "They seem to definitely want parental influence in the school."

Summary

The responses to questions 6 and 11, when coupled with the information derived from the interviews, reveal that the district, reflecting provincial attitudes to some extent, encourages and supports school responsiveness to parents. However, there were some indications from principals and teachers that pragmatic expediency, rather than commitment to the ideal of parental influence, might motivate superordinate behavior at times. The district was perceived as working through parental expectations to influence principals. That is, parental influence is perceived as a district control mechanism. It is significant that for both questionnaire items principals perceived the strongest district attitude and the most use of the control. They feel they are controlled by superordinates' emphasis on parent expectations and responsiveness to parents. In view of the province's relationship to districts, and the perceived provincial support for parental influence, a provincial control mechanism is also involved, perhaps for both schools and districts. The points made in this summary led to the following propositions.

Proposition 28. Superordinates strongly promote school responsiveness to parent expectations.

Proposition 29. Superordinates' actions are often based on expediency as well as commitment to the concept of parental influence.

Proposition 30. The school district uses parental influence to control principals.

Proposition 31. Principals, who have the responsibility for managing parents' influence on the school, feel superordinates' attitudes towards parental influence constitute a control on principal behavior.

Proposition 32. Parental influence constitutes a control on districts and schools for the province.

SUPERORDINATES, PRINCIPALS AND PARENTAL INFLUENCE

This section examines perceptions and documentation about the ways in which superordinates ensure that principals are subject to, and responsive to, parental influence. First, direct means are examined. Documentation is briefly analyzed, both for explicit and implied policies, and various interview data that indicate direct influence on principals are examined. Second, information about indirect ways in which superordinates ensure preferred attitudes in principals is sought in the data.

Direct Superordinate Influence on Principals

Documentation. According to traditional bureaucratic/hierarchical theory, influence or power relationships should be well documented and explicitly stated. Although the district studied exhibits many bureaucratic organizational features there is little recognition in formal documentation of the role of parents, despite the degree of influence they are perceived to have by organizational participants.

The District's "Policy Guideline and Administrative Procedure Handbook" has few references to parents, although the board of trustees first commended a closer school/parent relationship in 1944 (-- Catholic Schools,1977:165. Appendix D). Policy 100 (the mission statement) has already been noted for its lack of reference to parents. Under "Role of the Board of Trustees"(Policy 100), the only reference is the sixth injunction -- "To keep the public informed of all phases of operation of the school system." The Chief Superintendent's role description (guideline 109.1 - 109.8) does not mention parents although it might be assumed performance of the major duties would involve making some provisions for parents. There is no mention of parents in regard to the principal's role (guideline 109.1) except for the requirements of " meeting the needs of the community" and fostering a Catholic community. Teachers' duties (Policy 109) with regard to parents are specified as reporting on students only, though they are required to "perform those professional duties assigned to them by the principal." There is no mention of parents in "Evaluation of Teacher Performance" (Guideline 203). The absence of reference to parents, at least for principals, may not be unusual as Watson (1979:41) has pointed out that in the U.S.A. most large school systems define limits of principals' authority in only the most general way. And Schwartz, in his Canadian study (1981:245), cites Sarason to illustrate that job descriptions state or imply the minimum.

The district's Policy 105 on "Responsibilities in Decision-making" identifies parents as among "those who are most affected by" decisions on policies, guidelines and programs of the school system and who should be involved in their development. The guideline for "Role in Decision-Making" (A.P. 101.1) has "Community, Parents and Students" participating in policy development through advisory committees at the district level and "At the local school level through School Consultative Committees dealing with decisions pertaining to the individual school."

Policy 103 (A.P. 101.2) on "Communications" has "Catholic schools are agents of Catholic parents" as the first of three beliefs leading to three objectives, one of which states: "Solicit the advice of staff, students, parents and others on key issues."

Some specific policies stipulate parent participation. Parents should be involved in determining what social functions are held by a school (guideline 427); they should be on a committee to plan the form and nature of graduation exercises (Policy 4.15); their permission is required for field-trips (guideline 414); and they are entitled to reports on their children, which will be interpreted for them by teachers, and to "make decisions (after teacher recommendations) with respect to the educational program of the student" (Administrative procedure 304.1).

The "School Evaluation" guideline (419) nominates "Community Relations" as one of nine components to be reviewed, and acknowledges that in order to achieve Policy 100 parents are one of the five groups which have "a role to play in Catholic Education." For "System Evaluation," (guideline 420) parents are one of the groups who will have input and may be involved in the process; and one of the six components for review is "parental/community involvement." Parents are not listed among those who "may" be involved in "Program Evaluation" according to guideline 418, but "other members of the community" might be construed as including them.

A "Strategic Plan" (mimeographed copy) was adopted for the district in 1982 and under the heading of "Background Information" states: "Effective planning necessitates participation in the decision-making process at all levels, thereby providing a common focus and a sense of direction for all groups involved: staff, students, trustees and parents." The first item in the "Plan for Action" was to "Examine the role of Parent Advisory Committees in school based decisions," and this was to be the responsibility of the communications officer.

As a result, a report dated "1983 01 24," based on a survey and interviews, was presented to the board on 7th February, 1983 (Strategic Plan for Action. Item 1.1. Advisory Committees). The board endorsed recommendations that it make clear its support for PACs at all schools, that it suggest PACs should have written constitutions and parent chairpersons, and that the areas for consultation with PACs be "Specified clearly as school philosophy, school rules and conduct, and alternative curricular programs." The communications officer was nominated as PAC resource person and trustees were to meet annually with the chairpersons in each zone (areas).

"School Parent Advisory Committees" is a pamphlet which first appeared as a draft appendix to the communications officer's report to the board and was accompanied by the chief superintendent's suggestion that it be published and distributed to all PAC members. It was subsequently made available to schools and public. The pamphlet invites parents "to participate in a decision making process at the local school level," and "to participate in the development of policies, regulations and specific curriculum" at the district and school levels through advisory committees established for the two levels. A PAC for each school is encouraged "So that parents together with school staffs will have a formal channel of communication established to provide input to the school principal."

PAC activites are listed as: "gathering and interpreting information from the school community" on philosophy, rules and conduct, and alternative curricula; "identifying unique community needs and offering strategies or methods to meet" them; and assisting "in the communication flow between school and parents." A sample PAC constitution is provided, incorporating these activities as objectives and adding that the

PAC will assist the work of the school and "provide a means of democratic actions in meeting local needs."

The pamphlet has an obvious concern for circumscribing the activities of PACs. "The committee will act in an advisory capacity only." Parental influence is only to be "advice" as the law and the board assign responsibility for school operation to principal and staff. "The Committee will confine itself to general matters concerning the operation of the school." A constitution is needed to delineate "responsibility, authority and limitations," particularly because "some areas, such as the discussion of individual staff and student personalities, are not to be within the domain of the committee." Discussion of "specific student and teacher problems" is prohibited. The committee may not "act or be considered as a pressure group." For reasons that might be surmised, all members of the school staff are eligible for membership. "Each school principal is required to approve the contents of the constitution"; "all actions . . . are to be related to the principal of the school"; and any approach to the central administration or the board is to be through the principal.

A "Constitution for Parent-School Advisory Committee" (guideline 103.1) was approved in late 1985 though there does not appear to be general awareness of it as it was not mentioned at all during the study. It resembles that in the pamphlet but has been more judiciously drafted as the format is better, the wording more precise, and the committee title recognizes that staff are involved. It also is less concerned with circumscribing the committee and offers it more scope. The stated objectives are: (a) "advisory" to the "school administrator on school related matters"; (b) to promote communication; (c) to help in achieving Policy 100 goals and "a total Christian community"; (d) "to provide guidance/assistance in school sponsored activities"; and (e) "to work together." Six points under "role" include: (a) gathering, passing and interpreting information to and from the school, including "parents' concerns and opinions"; (b) planning and organizing activities; (c) promoting "an effective communication plan," and parental involvement, cooperation, and participation; and (d) identifying unique community needs, and strategies to meet them. Apart from the explicit "advisory" wording, the only constraints mentioned are the requirement of the president to "ensure that only general matters concerning school operations are discussed" and the statement that "The principal shall be ultimately responsible for the administration of the school."

The assistance given by the communications officer to schools in initiating a school parent-student handbook and the recurrent theme in the handbooks of parent communication and community relations signify district attitudes. The "Directory 1985/86" for the district calls attention to the establishment of PACs, "to promote communication and understanding." "Your 1986-87 School Calendar" has a message from the chairman of the board emphasizing communication, and a section entitled "Parents Can Participate" which "encourages parents to become involved" and lists opportunities such as PACs, language program advisory committees, LACs, and informal volunteer help. PACs "meet periodically during the term to discuss with the principal the programs and the operation of the school."

The communications officer's booklet, "How To Sell Your School," (1985) used in professional development for principals by the communication officer, has a strong emphasis on the importance of parent support. Principals are urged to "create awareness of an 'open door' school with parents welcome at any time." "The responsibility of the administration is to de-mystify the school; to make parents feel that it is an open, caring place that they can be part of -- if they so desire -- without being intimidated." These sentiments are echoed in "Taking Charge of Your PR," a reprint attached to the "Administrators' Bulletin" of 16 September, 1986. The glossy pamphlet," . . . Catholic Schools at Work in 1985" states, "Schools have parent committees through which parents are encouraged to be involved at the school level." In the document "A Summary of the 'Survey of Parental Attitudes in . . . Catholic

Schools"' (mimeographed,1985, Appendix D), which was sent to all schools, the district indicated it would review twelve matters with which parents had expressed less satisfaction. One of these was: "More parental involvement in decision making at the school and district level."

In summary, this review of district documentation has not produced much evidence of specific directions to principals regarding parents and their role. Policies and guidelines contain a number of general statements about involving parents and having them participate but, apart from a few specific matters, do not detail or mandate how principals should behave with regard to parents. The strategic plan gave some priority to examining parent participation through the PAC but the resulting pamphlet gives the impression of being as much concerned with circumscribing, as with promoting, parental influence. A more positive approach is seen in the latest guideline constitution but it is not well-known. Reference to quite a number of district publications does, however, reveal a theme that parents should be able to influence, at least through advice. There is a consistent message to principals and parents about involvement and participation. However, apart from the PAC which will be further discussed in the next chapter, principals are not given much guidance on how to manage parental influence. Two comments from principals illustrate the blend of understood expectations and discretion: "The district puts all the onus on the principal to satisfy the clientele -- it stresses that he has to respond to the locals"; "The system gives principals a lot of free rein . . . . Still, the principal has to stay within the system's scope; it's a road with boundaries and if you get on the shoulders there can be problems."

Questionnaire. Pertinent questionnaire items (questions 4, 6, 10 and 11 from Part I) have already been considered. The results suggest that there is a climate in the district which promotes parental influence. The district affords importance to parental expectations. Organizational participants perceive that the district makes clear its expectation that principals will gain and maintain parent support and be responsive to parents. They also tended to perceive that the district used parental influence as a means of controlling principals. Results from senior administrators for Part II, Question 4 show that eight out of nine consider the district "usually" has sufficient control over principals so there appears no concern that superordinates' direct influence on principals is insufficient.

Interviews. Interviewees were asked how the school district encouraged principals to be responsive to parents. Some respondents had difficulty with the notion of encouraging and it was explained that simply telling principals to do something did not ensure they did it, and there might need to be other encouragement. The responses are reported in some detail as they give some indication of the complexity and often subtlety of the processes through which the school system encourages responsiveness to parents.

Thirty six of the interviewees thought the system encouraged principal responsiveness to parents, but some had difficulty describing "how." Perhaps the most common view was expressed emphatically by a trustee; "They hear about it if they're not. We don't want little autocrats." One trustee was "sure it's policy," but the other interviewees were not aware of any explicit policy on responsiveness, although six referred to the Catholic "philosophy" or "view" and its embodiment in Policy 100. Six respondents cited PACs as evidence of policy. One trustee pointed to discipline policy where principals, she thought, were required to consult parents, and another thought it was in the principal's role description. The situation may have been best summed up by a principal who said: "The system gives the principal the responsibility and he does it within their policies." But another principal said, "Continually the system requests that parents be involved in as many activities as possible. And it stresses communications. Principals are urged to get feedback on any changes or activities."

One principal did not think the district encouraged principals to be responsive to parents. One cited lack of follow-up: "One problem with central office is that they tell us a lot but don't do anything to follow-up. So a lot of principals go through the procedures without any heart in it." This sceptical tone is seen in the view of a trustee expressed elsewhere in her interview: "A large proportion of the parent community is scared to make waves for fear their children will suffer. This is unhealthy and unfortunately is encouraged by some senior administration." A senior administrator saw senior administration as the "stumbling block" to parental influence and only "mouthing the philosophy that parents are the primary educators." He went on to explain that: "Unfortunately their only contact with parents at the central office is when there are complaints or problems and this affects their perception of parents -- a vicious circle is set up." He thought the emphasis from senior administration was on principals' managing parents rather than being responsive to them.

Several interviewees made the point that there was less involvement of parents in higher levels of schooling and this was why efforts of the district tended to focus on elementary schools.

Although principals do not have to form a PAC, two interviewees drew attention to pressure to do so: "When the chief superintendent's secretary asks for the PAC names to be sent into the office, that speaks for itself."; "Little things like the secretary calling to ask for the name of the chairperson -- if you don't have a PAC, you get one quickly. Or they send a document asking the principal to forward it immediately or to have the PAC consider it at the next meeting." The two principals interviewed, whose schools did not have a PAC, seemed well rehearsed with their reasons, as though they felt the need to justify themselves.

The direct supervisors of principals, area superintendents, may be the key to much of the direct pressure on principals to be responsive to parents since, as one senior administrator said, "If the area superintendent is keen on the idea then he/she pushes it." An area superintendent stressed the importance of "one to one" discussion for getting principals to do what was required, and a trustee thought superintendents "have ways of keeping people in line."

The emphasis by the district on marketing was mentioned by six interviewees as encouraging responsiveness to parents. Comments by two principals illustrate the connection: "First and foremost we have to sell our system and schools to the parents"; "The system wants to know what the principal is doing to attract students. To do so it is critical to have a good relationship with parents."

Several principals drew attention to the way the district promoted getting parents involved in the school itself, as volunteers, and for religious celebrations. Another principal referred to the "open-door policy" of the district as a cue to what was expected.

The district's adoption of the provincial early childhood policy was seen by four interviewees as direct system encouragement of responsiveness to parents which, one senior administrator said "the policy almost demands." A teacher noted LACs were having representatives' meetings on an area basis. Another senior administrator pointed to the example set by having system-wide committees for language groups and religious education curricula. Two interviewees made reference to the trustee forums that had been organized with stress on parents' being involved and participating.

Various other means by which the district encourages principal responsiveness to parents received one or two mentions: administrators' meetings, in-service, school newsletters, parent handbooks, and interview report to parents.

As trustees represent parents, their contacts with principals could constitute a form of direct superordinate influence on principals to be sensitive to parents. It was acknowledged by interviewees that trustees do not, formally, have a direct relationship with principals. However, some trustees do deal directly with some principals. Principals, when asked about their contacts with trustees, reported a varied picture though generally it was one of little contact. As some trustees go directly to some principals, this might encourage responsiveness to what parents are expressing through the trustees. But this direct superordinate influence appears to depend largely on personal associations established over the years.

None of the principals expressed any concerns about the protocol of being approached directly by trustees. Trustees indicated they generally observed the formalities but, on the other hand: "Each has a different style. I might phone a school to 'discuss and advise'"; "Sometimes if you like them, you might give a warning on the q.t."; "I avoid contacting them on directional/operational matters, but it's OK for softer, accommodational matters"; "On occasion I will communicate with a principal," and she gave an example of parents coming to her home. Senior administrators generally pointed out that trustees should not go direct to principals: "They're supposed to act only as a board"; "The chief superintendent takes the matter up with them as he is very strong on protocol." Area superintendents, however, indicated, "Unfortunately some do. Some see themselves in the judgmental role." It seems that the greatest effectiveness of trustees in encouraging principal responsiveness does not derive from direct contacts with principals but rather from when their concerns are relayed, indirectly, through senior administration.

Summary. The school district builds a climate of expectations that principals will ensure parents have influence while, at the same time, managing parents. The review of the documents did not reveal a specific policy enunciated in detail on how much influence parents should have or how their influence should be managed except in regard to parent advisory committees. But there was a general theme in the documents that parents should be participating. Similarly, the interview data on how the district encourages principals to be responsive to parents revealed no specific techniques but rather a theme of parent importance conveyed in many ways. These impressions from the documents and interviews confirmed the questionnaire results which demonstrated very clearly that organizational participants believe parent expectations have to be regarded as important.

There is a climate of expectations for principals. While the principal has considerable discretion to manage parents, he is expected to ensure they are satisfied and that the district's objectives for parent participation are met.

There was little evidence of direct influence by trustees, as the representatives of parents, on principals. Their influence appears to be exerted indirectly, through senior administrators.

The discretion allowed principals is a rational provision because the unique situation faced by each school requires its own solution. The blend of expectations of the principal and discretion afforded is conveyed subtly in a quotation from the chief superintendent writing in the "Administrators' Bulletin" (Volume III, Issue 2, 16.9.86): "Thank you for your patience in resolving some of the difficult staffing situations and for the positive way you communicated to your parents what was happening and why."

Indirect Superordinate Influence on Principals

This section is concerned with some indirect means through which the district shapes parental influence on schools and makes principals sensitive to parents. First, the district's role in building parent expectations is examined. Then, the effects of parent access to superordinates and their handling of parent complaints are the focus of interest.

Expectations. The results for Part I, Question 11 established the perceived importance of parental expectations as a means through which the district influenced principals. Question 12 asked for perceptions of the district's shaping parent expectations.

Part I, Question 12. How important is it that your school district administration convinces parents of the value of its objectives and policies so that they will, in turn, have these expectations of schools?

The results shown in Table 36 demonstrate that all groups recognize that it is important that the district directly foster parent expectations. Over 90 percent of respondents thought it was important for the district to shape parent expectations of schools and just under half of all respondents rated the item "very important". Organizational participants recognize that the district should persuade parents of the value of its own expectations of schools in order to influence the schools through parents. Other than question 11, this question came closest to asking respondents about their perception of parental influence as a mechanism for district control of principal behavior. Although further statistical analysis would be needed before any conclusion could be drawn, the results here seem a stronger indication, with an overall mean of 1.61 as opposed to 1.91 for question 11. The difference might be because in question 12 parent expectations are seen as influencing the whole school, not just the principal, and there is no mention of 'control'.

Table 36
District Building Parent Expectations
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	4 (67)	2 (33)	-	-	6
Senior Administrator	6 (67)	2 (22)	1 (11)	-	9
Principal	19 (45)	19 (45)	4 (10)	-	42
Teacher	48 (48)	43 (43)	9 (9)	1 (1)	101
Total	77 (49)	66 (42)	14 (9)	1 (1)	158

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

The results for the professional educators are very similar. Trustees were unanimous in agreeing on at least "important" and this may reflect their political concerns. However, only one trustee made the point during interview that "an important duty (of trustees) is to interpret education to the community," and to make "an effort to persuade parents, to give the picture as I see it."

Access to Superordinates. By making themselves accessible to parents, superordinates may give parents indirect influence over principals. This will depend upon how the approaches are handled. The phone numbers of trustees are published in the district's calendar which is distributed to all parents, presumably to facilitate parent contacts. Both trustees and senior administrators were asked about the frequency of their contacts with parents and the nature of those contacts. Senior administrators were also queried as to how much information about parent concerns was passed on to them by trustees.

In Part II, item 5 of the questionnaire, trustees were asked how often they received information about individual schools and principals . The responses were: usually 1, frequently 3, occasionally 1, and seldom 1. While it seems there is a good deal of contact with parents it varies considerably amongst trustees. Senior administrators were asked the same question (Part II, Question 6) and the responses were: frequently 3, occasionally 4, seldom 2. While they reported receiving somewhat less information from parents there still appears to be some contact, varying with the office or individual.

All trustees indicated during interviews that they had contacts with parents but the frequency, as also indicated in the questionnaire results, varied. Most parent contact was reported by the two trustees who were homemakers and who, apparently, have more time to establish and maintain informal contacts. One said, "You wouldn't believe the extent of attempts to influence me. I can't go anywhere without being approached -- at weddings, Safeway, the mall." Another mentioned "phone calls all the time." The other trustees reported fewer contacts, although they could become very frequent when there was a hot issue like school closure. Comments ranged from "a fair amount" to "not a lot". All agreed contacts could be made anytime and anywhere because, as one said, "It goes with the territory." Some of the trustees also mentioned mediated contacts: one spoke of the parents of teachers approaching her and another commented that "People who have worked on my campaign and others I've known all my life make sure I know what parents are thinking." One trustee pointed out that "The Catholic community is not that large," and others mentioned parish functions, the clergy and ethnic associations as means through which they were made aware of parent concerns.

No senior administrator had any regular means for obtaining parent views or feedback from parents. The only related comments were an area superintendent's claim that he "makes an effort to be recognized" by parents, and the mention by another of his membership on a district wide language committee as an opportunity to listen to parents. There is, apparently, no recognized need amongst senior administrators to have their own means of monitoring parent opinion. One actually said he "doesn't see a specific need for this." Senior administrators apparently do not see any need to have their own links to parents and see themselves in more of a firefighting role, dealing with problems as they arise. Parent contact is considered a matter for principals who are expected to pass up the line any pertinent information. "It's mainly a matter of hearing from principals in getting a reading on what parents think." Senior administrators may also regard parents as the trustees' concern at district. The point was made frequently in senior administrators' comments on the attempt to organize PACs district-wide that the trustees represent parents. The need for senior administration to learn how to work with parents is currently being pursued in the United States. (Lamm, 1986) Most senior administrators agreed they received unsolicited comments on schools and principals on all sorts of occasions: "Those who do recognize you, will take the opportunity anywhere to make comments"; "Often there is some bitching about a particular situation at a school."

Senior administrators were also asked whether trustees acted as a conduit for parents in approaching them. The answers varied from "not much" to "(they) do feed a lot in." Area superintendents, who have direct responsibility for schools, were generally satisfied with the way trustees handled complaints. One said, "Most deal with me on school matters," and the other said, "They will call . . . if they have a concern and ask us to find out what's going on." However, the comment of another senior administrator is more revealing: "If they receive one or two or three calls they'll discuss it with the area superintendent or chief superintendent and immediately there'll be a crisis." Apparently, trustees also raise concerns at conference meetings and, as one senior administrator said, "One or two save them up . . . and catch us by surprise."

In summary, it appears direct parent access to trustees and senior administrators, either formally or informally, is an irregular but recognized means for parent based monitoring of principals and schools. Only a few of the trustees appear to have a lot of contact with parents. However, principals may believe there is much more monitoring than actually occurs. Principals seem very much aware of parent access to superordinates and try to forestall parents' approaching superordinates by resolving problems themselves. While parent contacts with superordinates may not be frequent and senior administrators see no need to have their own means of monitoring parent opinion, the way in which superordinates react to those contacts that do occur carries a clear implication to the principal. Superordinates treat the contacts as urgent and important and expect the principal to act on them.

Complaint Handling. Complaints are the most common reason for parents approaching superordinates and how superordinates react has implications for parental influence. The established procedure is to try to persuade the complainant to take the matter up with the school principal and, if necessary, to inform the appropriate line administrator.

All trustees claimed to use the accepted procedure in handling complaints they received. As one said, "Trustees are shaped by the administration to go about business this way." Two recounted instances of their embarrassment as novice trustees when complaints they pursued zealously proved to be poorly founded. Trustees refer complainants back to the teacher or principal concerned, may give complainants numbers to phone in central office, and screen the complaints before acting themselves to alert appropriate senior administrators. Some illustrative responses were: "I just file a notification with the chief superintendent and ask him to let me know if he perceives a problem"; "I alert the superintendent to the problem generally. Sometimes parents are hesitant because they fear the child will be singled out, so I tell them I'll ensure the superintendent is aware of the matter"; "Trustees should let the administration know when a complaint seems to be true."

One trustee thought three or four principals had been moved because of complaints passed on through her and commented, "Principals ignore parent influence at their peril." Another said, "If there's enough complaints central office will investigate to put out the fire."

There was considerable similarity in senior administrators' descriptions of how they handled complaints, whether they were direct from parents or relayed through a trustee. Typically, the matter was referred to the principal either by trying to get the complainant to establish contact or, if necessary, acting as intermediary and ringing the principal, and attending a meeting between complainant and principal. There seemed to be two clear objectives in this approach, apart from the advantages of trying to resolve a problem at source and avoiding unnecessary work if there was no fault at the school level. First, it emphasizes the responsibility of the principal to resolve the matter. As a senior administrator said, "If there's a problem with parents then the heat is put on the principal." Second, it forestalls any implication of lack of support for the principal or school. Area superintendents, in particular, emphasized the lengths they go to in order to assure schools that all complaints are passed on ("try desperately"). They are aware that staff in schools believe superordinates hear a lot more from parents than they reveal.

The principals interviewed seemed confident that their superintendents did pass on any complaints or concerns, as well as compliments, brought to them directly by parents or through trustees. Some comments were: "Area superintendents are super at passing on parent comments"; "At the odd time the superintendent will call because he's had a contact from a trustee." In fact, the procedure for referring complaints immediately to the principal is so well developed that in many instances secretaries relay the parent concern.

What is most significant for this study is the way the concern is relayed to the school. One principal said, "The district encourages follow-up on parent concerns and questions," but this seems mild in view of other principals' perceptions of the situation. "If a parent complains to the central office, it's sent to the school and you'd better rectify it." "If the principal does something the parents don't like then he's called into central office or the administration will come out to the school." A teacher may have made the point best: "It (central office) contacts schools when parents call and this shows the central office reacts immediately. The speed of reaction is the message."

In summary, the manner in which complaints are handled by superordinates emphasizes to principals the importance of parents, the desirability of keeping them satisfied, and that parent concerns deserve urgent attention. It is also made clear that resolution of the problem is the principal's responsibility.

Summary

Direct superordinate influence on principal behavior, pertinent to parents as a control, was summarized at the end of that section. Conclusions drawn there lead to the following propositions.

Proposition 33: Well understood expectations within the school district exert pressure on principals to allow parents to influence their schools while at the same time ensuring parental influence is appropriately constrained.

Proposition 34. Expectations both to accommodate and manage parental influence are conveyed to the principal through district publications; implications of various policies, guidelines, actions and programs; as well as through direct interaction with superordinates.

Proposition 35. Representatives of parents (i.e., trustees) seldom influence principals directly.

In the section on indirect superordinate influence pertinent to parents as a control, the questionnaire results clearly showed the school system is perceived to mould parent expectations in order to bring their influence to bear on schools. School and principal performance are monitored by superordinates through the access parents have to them, although this access is not utilized as much as might be thought in schools. The manner in which parent contacts, and particularly complaints, are handled by superordinates, makes clear to principals that parents are important, their concerns must be afforded priority, and it is the principal's responsibility to see they are satisfied. Senior administrators do not regard parent relations as their responsibility except where there is a problem which the principal cannot resolve. Propositions drawn from this section follow.

Proposition 36. Parent access to superordinates is a recognized but irregular, and often informal, means of monitoring principal behavior.

Proposition 37. Superordinates regard parents as the principal's responsibility and they make this attitude clear to principals.

Proposition 38. Principals perceive that superordinates attach considerable importance to complaints from parents, particularly if a trustee is involved.

Proposition 39. Complaint handling by superordinates demonstrates they expect priority will be given to parent concerns and that the principal will satisfy parents.

REWARD SYSTEM

The influence of parents may be accentuated if the rewards available to people in the school system are in part determined by their ability to accommodate parental influence. Accommodation of parental influence may involve managing parents. That is, principals may shape, channel and control the nature and extent of their influence on the school. However, it is assumed that such managing will also entail at least some concessions to parents. That is, their wishes will be allowed to prevail to some extent.

In this section the questionnaire data are analyzed for indications of whether parents have any part in the evaluation of schools and the assessment, promotion, transfer, and selection of principals. Principal and teachers' perceptions of these processes are also examined through the interview records.

School Evaluation

The Questionnaire. An item on the importance of parental support in school evaluation was included in the questionnaire not only to ascertain whether parental support is perceived as an important component in assessing the worth of a school, but also because principals identify with their schools and may interpret any deficiencies as their own failings. Principals (and their staff) seek the best evaluation of their school as a reward.

Part I, Question 18. How important is evidence of parental support in evaluation of schools by the school district's senior administrators?

The question apparently caused some problems for respondents as one principal put "N.A." and eight teachers did not respond, with one writing "unknown" and another that she did not know current policy. Regular formal school evaluations were not instituted until recently and consequently most respondents would have no experience of them. However, it was assumed respondents might answer on the basis of their perception of informal appraisals by senior administrators.

The results presented in Table 37 show a strong perception that evidence of community support is important in a school's evaluation with, overall, 75 percent of respondents rating it "important" or "most important."

Senior administrators who were nominated in the question as doing the evaluation had the lowest mean, and principals, who are just as close to the situation, had the next lowest mean. For the evaluators, 89 percent thought evidence of parent support was at least important in school evaluation, and for the evaluated, the principals, 85 percent rated it "important" or "very important." The significance of these results is in the recognition by those most involved that if a school wants a good evaluation it must show it has parental support.

Table 37
Parent Support and School Evaluation
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	2 (33)	2 (33)	2 (33)	-	6
Senior Administrator	3 (33)	5 (56)	1 (11)	-	9
Principal	7 (17)	28 (68)	6 (15)	-	41
Teacher	13 (14)	54 (56)	25 (26)	4 (4)	96
Total	25 (16)	89 (59)	34 (22)	4 (3)	152

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

Seventy percent of teachers also rated the item "important" or "very important," thus emphasizing they recognize the importance of parental support. Trustees had the highest mean for this item and this may indicate they feel the professionals do not give parents enough recognition.

Principal Assessment, Transfer and Promotion

Questionnaire. Three items dealt with parental influence on principal assessment, transfer and promotion. As with question 18, these items had the highest levels of non-response for the questionnaire (7 to 9 or about 5 percent). Nearly all non-respondents were teachers who sometimes simply stated that they did not know. Absence of standard, open procedures and a current changeover to a new principal evaluation scheme apparently made responding more difficult.

Part I, Question 17. What importance is attached to information from the school's parent community in a superintendent's assessment of a principal's performance?

Although this question had one of the higher aggregate means for all respondents, as Table 38 shows, there was still a substantial majority (70 percent) perception that superintendents give importance to information from parents in assessment of a principal's performance.

Table 38
Parent Information in Principal Assessment
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	1 (17)	4 (67)	1 (17)	-	6
Senior Administrator	1 (11)	3 (33)	5 (56)	-	9
Principal	4 (10)	27 (64)	8 (19)	3 (7)	42
Teacher	8 (8)	59 (62)	24 (25)	5 (5)	96
Total	14 (9)	93 (61)	38 (25)	8 (5)	153

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

Over half the senior administrators responded "unimportant." Trustees tended in the opposite direction with all except one rating at least "important." The results indicate that principals, teachers and trustees perceive that senior administrators are influenced by parents in their assessment of principals. However, the senior administrators do not acknowledge this to the same extent. That 74 percent of principals perceive parent input as important in their assessment by superordinates indicates a strong basis for parental influence.

Part I. Question 21 How important in improving a principal's promotion chances is demonstrated ability to gain parental support for a school?

As Table 39 shows, 79 percent of the respondents perceive that demonstrated ability to gain parental support improves a principal's promotion chances. All senior administrators and at least 83 percent of principals rated the item as at least important. If principals believe their promotion chances depend on parent support then there is a strong foundation for parental influence.

Table 39
Promotion and Parental Support
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	2 (33)	3 (50)	1 (17)	-	6
Senior Administrator	1 (11)	8 (89)	-	-	9
Principal	12 (29)	22 (54)	7 (17)	-	41
Teacher	20 (20)	53 (54)	21 (21)	4 (4)	98
Total	35 (23)	86 (56)	29 (19)	4 (3)	154

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

These results are considerably stronger than for the previous question and this is difficult to explain. More of the respondents thought "demonstrated ability to gain parental support" is important to a principal's prospects than "information from parents" is in their assessment. Apparently "parental support" is assessed to some extent on bases other than information from parents, such as managing parents. This interpretation is supported because the greatest difference between the results for the two questions is for senior administrators.

Part I. Question 20. For a principal seeking a favourable transfer, how important is evidence of ability to gain parental support for a school?

This item was included because promotion opportunities for principals are limited. An alternative reward may be transfer to another school which offers advantages to the principal.

As might be expected the results shown in Table 40 are similar to those for question 21, although overall there is a slightly stronger perception of importance (81 percent).

Table 40
Principal and Parent Support
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	2 (33)	3 (50)	1 (17)	-	6
Senior Administrator	1 (11)	5 (56)	3 (33)	-	-
Principal	10 (25)	24 (60)	6 (15)	-	40
Teacher	26 (27)	51 (53)	18 (19)	2 (2)	97
Total	39 (26)	83 (55)	28 (18)	2 (1)	152

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

Organizational participants generally believe that the ability to gain parental support can help a principal obtain a favourable transfer. The group showing most difference from question 21 is the senior administrators, one of whom offered an explanation that parent support was only of importance in the negative sense of where a principal had experienced difficulties, as the district does not "go out and solicit" parental input. That 85 percent of principals thought parental support was at least important to their obtaining a favourable transfer is, once again, a significant reason for believing principals are sensitive to parental influence.

Interviews. Principals were asked whether superordinates received much information from parents and whether this played a part in assessment of the school and themselves. Most thought in terms of complaints and generally the principals interviewed did not think their superintendents received much information from parents, and that when they did they passed it on. Some illustrative comments are: "Not sure how you would measure. . . . If there were a lot of calls, obviously there is something to enquire about. No news might be good news"; "If they do get much they're not sharing it with us"; "When he does hear something he always phones and asks about it." An atypical comment was: "Superintendents like to have a pipeline to parents. They have some people in the community who regularly communicate to them about the schools. You know darn well they do form an impression from such comments."

In contrast to the 74 percent in Table 38, not quite half the principals thought information from parents played a part in their assessment. However, there was some difficulty with the question because the interviewees had no experience of regular assessment other than annual goal setting and there was a tendency to think only in terms of complaints. A comment typical of those who saw a link was: "What parents say to superintendents does enter into the assessment of principals -- it's a subjective thing." One principal pointed out that "If something is not measured, it's not done," with the implication that through assessment superintendents directed the attention of principals to parents.

Documentation. There is limited documentation on evaluation and assessment in the district in the past. The contents of the "Policy Guideline and Administrative Procedure Handbook" have been described in the second section of this chapter. Up until the year of the study there had been an annual goal setting exercise between each area superintendent and the principals in his jurisdiction and an evaluation of new principals or transferees in their first year. The format of the latter was not standardized but apparently some area superintendents have solicited parent input for these evaluations.

More recent documents indicate a trend to greater recognition of parents. The new principal evaluation procedure is outlined in "Application, Regulation and Guidelines for Administrative Appointments" (1986) and has three prongs. The first is annual goal setting which is, according to the chief superintendent, writing in the "Administrators' Bulletin," "a refinement of our existing practice of yearly objective setting and monitoring," with an evaluative statement added. The principal performance review will be on a three year cycle and will be based on eight areas of responsibility. For each area there are listed, in the report of the principal evaluation committee (Evaluative Procedures. Document 2), a number of indicators which do reflect considerable recognition of parents. Thus, (a) in providing effective leadership, parents are to be involved in developing a written school philosophy; (b) in contributing to the district, positive relationships with the community are mentioned; (c) effective organization for learning includes procedures for communication with parents; (d) providing a positive climate for learning and teaching involves seeking and using appropriate advice and insight from the community, and positive reinforcement and recognition of contributions of parents; and (e) effective communication is two way, includes the community, and is performed in a variety of ways including advisory groups.

In summary, the questionnaire results show that most respondents perceived ability to enlist parent support as important to a principal's chances for promotion or favourable transfer. Similarly, but not as strongly, information from parents is perceived as important in assessment of principals. The difference can be explained by responses during interviews with principals where most did not think superintendents received a lot of information from parents. Rather, they felt parents' information counted mainly when there were a lot of complaints. This is similar to the negative influence notion described with regard to staffing in Chapter 6. The documents on principal evaluation show that relationships with parents are assuming a greater significance in evaluating principals.

Principal Selection

There was a twofold purpose in examining the data for indications of parental influence in selection of principals. First, if parents do have a role in selection this would indicate their influence and a possible sensitizing to their influence of those seeking promotion. For example, Porter-Gehrie et al. claim (1978) that administratively appointed principals appeared more receptive to the central administration, while community selected principals put community and staff relations first. Second, if ability to work with parental influence is a criterion for selection, this emphasizes the importance of parental influence and indicates that those moving into the principalship may be more receptive to parental influence. A trustee commented in this regard that those principals who did not work with parents were being "phased out" by time. Some indications are to be found in Storlein's questionnaire study (1983) of recruitment and selection of secondary principals in the province. He found there was a closed shop in recruitment, political interference was an identified problem, and attitudes were against parent involvement. But human relations skill was the most common criterion for selection of principals.

Documents. The booklet "Application, Regulation and Guidelines for Administrative Appointments" (1986) is intended for those seeking promotion. It contains copies of Policy 100 and the role of the principal (guideline 109.1) as described earlier. Amongst the criteria used by the administrative candidates committee is: "demonstrated administrative ability and/or potential and commitment to the philosophy and objectives of the school district."

A rating scale is used by the committee. It does not mention parents but the candidate's potential in parent relations could possibly be assessed through three of the items which contribute to a possible score of forty seven. A member of the central administration interviews the applicant and awards a score out of ten. While it is stipulated that the interview structure is determined by the interviewer, parent relations may be examined. One principal pointed out that during his interview he had been questioned about working with a PAC. The principal's recommendation carries 10 points and includes amongst the criteria: "Ability to draw out the resources of the community and its representatives in a way which facilitates the attainment of educational goals," and "Ability to deal with the community and its representatives in a way which fosters a favourable public feeling toward the school system." The school staff opinion survey accounts for fifteen points and includes similar criteria.

While the documentation describes a straightforward procedure involving openness and unbiassed selection, the feeling of many interviewed, from trustees to teachers, and including one from the teachers' association , was that the senior administration decided who would be selected. A principal's comment, when asked how the system encouraged principals to be responsive to parents, highlights the significance of this point: "In the first place, the system selects that type of person. Principals are selected because they can set up good communications and have the type of personality to butter over, to at least meet with and not upset parents. . . . The principal has to internalize and exhibit those characteristics the system wants."

Trustees. Although the board ultimately makes appointments, trustees have little part in the actual selection process which they see as controlled by the administration. Their participation in the process is, as one said, "deleting out rather than adding in." Sometimes their questioning leads to altered recommendations from the administration. This may occur when recommendations for promotions are first made and when recommendations are made for confirmation a year after initial appointment. One trustee observed she had "occasionally commented on a nomination and found that the next time the list comes up, something has been done." Another said, "We do discuss these matters in private and have confrontations with the superintendent." In contrast, another trustee said, "Sometimes you have to bite your tongue on how the nominee is perceived in the community and whether he can be trusted to uphold board policies."

Trustees, as representatives of parents, have only a limited role in principal selection. They give formal approval to recommendations and may occasionally exercise a veto. However, their influence on those who do control the process may be greater than appearances suggest, as one commented: "Messages are put out even though it's a large city." And for its possible effect on the ambitious, the comment of another is significant: "People think trustees have more power than they do."

Senior Administrators. There were some differences amongst senior administrators as to whether the "ability to gain parental support" played any part in principal selection, with some saying it was a criterion and others saying the opposite. One said it was included in the principal's report and another said it was in the teachers' questionnaire. All agreed that there had been only one case, for a francophone school, where parents had formally participated in the process. There was agreement that a record of poor parent relationships could rule out promotion. "It operates in a negative sense -- you hear about the ones doing poorly." "If a principal or a teacher has a series of bad incidents with parents, he can forget about promotion." "The principal who was demoted because of loss of parent support has not been successful in applications for the principalship since then." A senior administrator acknowledged the administration's control of the selection process and claimed that "points" were given to the applicant who showe "he can control his parents."

Teachers. Teachers were asked what qualities a teacher needed in order to get promotion. Their replies did not indicate a good knowledge of the process. However, most did mention qualities pertinent to parent relationships: "need to be a diplomat"; "build rapport"; "personable, kind and able to deal with parents and teachers." Some cynical comments indicated promotion was viewed as an "insider" matter.

In summary, the data indicate parents have virtually no formal role in selection of principals. However, they do influence principal selection in two ways. First, an applicant is increasingly being called upon to demonstrate he can establish appropriate relationships with parents and this implies being receptive to their influence to some extent. Second, a record of parental dissatisfaction can bar a teacher from promotion. The promotion process appears to be largely controlled by senior administrators. Trustees, as representatives of parents, have only a limited veto power, though there are some suggestions that informal information exchange may help to determine the recommendations they receive for approval. Senior administrators also see parental influence as mainly operating to debar candidates. Teachers acknowledge an ability to establish satisfactory relationships with parents as an attribute required for promotion.

Summary

This section has examined the data for indications that parental influence is an important factor in the district's reward system. It clearly is. Evidence of parental support is perceived as important for favourable school evaluation and in improving a principal's opportunities for promotion and transfer. Information from parents is important in principal assessment. Ability to establish satisfactory relations with parents is considered in principal selection. Although the evidence was strong for all these aspects of the reward system, there were some indications that parental influence may operate more obviously in the negative sense of poor parent relations preventing access to rewards. Influence on the reward system implies a potential to influence the behavior of reward recipients. However, it is also clear that senior administrators largely control the reward system and, it might be assumed, the kind of behavior in regard to parents which is rewarded. Propositions were drawn from these conclusions.

Proposition 40. The district reward system in the form of school evaluation, promotion, and principal assessment and transfer, reflects parental influence, especially in the negative sense of barring access to rewards.

Proposition 41. Parents influence principals by affecting the rewards available, but the nature and extent of this influence is largely determined by senior administrators who control the reward system.

SUMMARY

This chapter has established through the perceptions of respondents and review of relevant documents that parental influence is fostered by the school system as an environmental mechanism controlling principal behavior. The main findings have been itemized as propositions twenty eight to forty one. Responsiveness of principals to parents is a major theme in the district through a complex web of direct and indirect pressures. Both principals and other organizational participants recognize that parents are a major control over schools. For principals, there is the problem of establishing a balance in allowing parents to influence the school while at the same time meeting the expectations of superordinates and others to manage the influence of parents. Superordinates clearly place the responsibility for the management of parental influence with the principal and have expectations of how the function will be performed. In this situation parents do influence principal behavior and what happens in schools but their influence is circumscribed by the competing influences on the principal, particularly that of senior administrators.

The following chapter concludes the analysis of the data by examining respondents' perceptions of parents and some of the means through which they influence principals and schools.

CHAPTER IX

PARENTS, THEIR INFLUENCE AND THE PRINCIPAL

While the perceptions of parents as to their influence on schools and principals were not considered in this study (except for representative trustees), the organizational participants reported perceptions about parents and the means through which they influenced principals. Consideration of these completes the analysis of the data gathered during the study.

The influence of parents was generally perceived to have grown, partly because of the growing expectations parents have of schools. These expectations are examined first. A recurring theme in the interviews was that only some parents are active in exerting influence. The data are considered for indications about this phenomenon and, in particular, any relationship between parental influence and socio-economic status (a variable traditionally associated with degree of influence). Special identity groups were frequently mentioned by interviewees as examples of parental influence, and consequently a section of the chapter is devoted to them.

The actual means by which parents exert influence are the concern of the second half of the chapter. Particular attention is given to parent advisory committees as vehicles created for this purpose and because they were extensively referred to by respondents. Other direct and indirect means of parental influence are discussed, largely in terms of data already analyzed.

INFLUENCE AND PARENT CHARACTERISTICS

Organizational participants believe that parents are showing a greater interest in the schooling of their children and have higher expectations of being able to influence the school. Further evidence on parental expectations from the questionnaire is examined in this section and followed by an examination of whether some parents are perceived as more influential than others.

Expectations

Part I. Question 9. What importance do parents attach to the school's meeting their expectations?

In Table 41, the results demonstrate considerable agreement amongst the groups that parents attach importance to the school's meeting their expectations.

Table 41
Parental Expectations of the School
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	3 (50)	3 (50)	-	-	6
Senior Administrator	4 (44)	5 (56)	-	-	9
Principal	19 (45)	23 (55)	-	-	42
Teacher	39 (38)	63 (61)	2 (2)	-	104
Total	65 (40)	94 (58)	2 (1)	-	161

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

The importance perceived by respondents is indicated by the low mean response (1.61). Only two teachers from the 161 respondents did not respond with at least "important" and 40 percent of the total respondents thought "very important" was the best description of the priority parents gave to their own expectations of schools.

The strength of the perception seems inconsistent with a commonly heard observation during the study that only a small proportion of parents are "interested." This suggests a loose use of terminology in that those making the observation might really mean "active." If parents are perceived as attaching so much importance to their expectations it is difficult to conclude that most are uninterested.

Are Some Parents More Influential?

The question of whether some parents are more influential than others was asked in all interviews and invariably the subjects agreed that some parents are more influential than others. There were also a number of comments from the questionnaire. For example, a teacher wrote in answer to item 9, Part I of the questionnaire: "For some parents." There appear to be at least two dimensions to this phenomenon of variable parental influence. Parents of one school can be more influential than parents of another, as seen in a senior administrator's comment: "Each school varies considerably in a community as diverse as . . . ."; or a principal's comment that "Every school is a little different." One reason for the variation amongst schools is the principal. Other reasons examined later in this section are the socio-economic status of the parent community and the specialized nature of the school.

The other dimension is seen within the parent body of any school. Some of the school's parents more actively try to influence than others. There were several descriptions of this variation. One principal said there were 5 percent at either extreme -- the "very positive" and "those who gossip and have nothing better to do." Another wrote of the 95 percent who "support" and 5 percent "vocal opposition." A teacher wrote a more judicious appraisal on her questionnaire:

> In many cases there is always a core group that does influence administration in many ways though not often perceived as so. However, because of being in the school a lot they are privy to a lot of bits of information (sometimes misinformation). This core group does carry a lot of information out of the school and tends to influence other parents as well. This is in no way to be construed as good or bad -- just an observation of the way things "really" are.

Characteristics of the Influential. Respondents described the more influential parents in various terms: "crusading", "ambitious," "more articulate," "know how to use the machinery for getting their views across," "higher expectations," "more convincing," "higher educational level," "nouveau riche and the insecure," "better organized," "involved," "strong personalities," "more concerned," "more aggressive." "Interest in their children" was commonly mentioned. Some teachers' descriptions were vivid: "Some with a little knowledge think they know a lot while the better educated realise they know little and so don't like to become involved"; "The ones who yell louder, want more, and are most concerned."

Some principals and teachers drew a distinction between the "sensible" parents to whom they were prepared to listen, and: "a few 'professional' complainers and people who over-react to situations," or, "The petty complainers (who) are quickly identified and usually have little effect on decision making." Part of the role of the principal is, apparently, distinguishing between the two. As one said: "If you know the parents, you know whether you want to be influenced by them." And a teacher commented, "Sometimes they run the whole show. They intimidate a principal and he kowtows to them." One reason principals accept the influence of such minorities is well illustrated in a principal's observation that: "Lack of support from senior administrators and school boards enables small parent factions to dictate policy." Similar comments about lack of superordinate support in the face of parental opposition were made by other principals, teachers, and even a trustee. They indicate a restriction on principal discretion because superordinates do side with parents at times.

Socio-economic Status. Of the thirty four interviewees whose responses could be classified, nineteen thought parental influence varied with socio-economic status, while another eight agreed with some reservations, and seven thought it did not. A trustee commented: "When there are changes to things like busing and programs, superintendents and trustees know that they have to go the extra mile to bring lower SES parents into the fold, whereas the higher SES seek them out." Another wrote: "In (the) inner city parents may not have time or ability to act as advocates for their children. In an affluent suburban school, there are many vocal, articulate parents who make great demands on the school system." Similarly, a senior administrator pointed out that the affluent "are articulate and have the know how," and another confirmed this by saying that "delegations to the board over the last three or four years" did not involve any from an inner-city school.

Principals cited their experience in different schools: from a lower SES area where "parents didn't give a damn" to "There's a lot of money here. People own businesses and influence via dollars. There are phone calls to superintendents and trustees. If I lose a student, downtown wants to know why." A teacher spoke of teachers from high socio-economic areas telling her "parents tell them what to do," and another wrote of never having "seen direct influence -- maybe because in 17 years (I) never taught in (an) upper class area." Another, who had taught in a variety of socio-economic areas, was quite definite: "The parents who are most highly educated and well off exert the most influence over the principal. Perhaps this is partly due to the fact that they do not hesitate to make their needs known to the school board."

Socio-economic status is often associated with geographical areas of a city. A principal wrote: "Parental expectations and involvement are very different from school to school depending on the area of the city and the political awareness of the parent group." Another principal gave a graphic account of his encounters with parents in a high SES area when he first came to the school and then described how the community had rapidly become lower SES with an associated fall-off in pressure from parents. While SES is associated with geographical area and with parental influence, the relationship is far from clear-cut as the discussion in Chapter 4 made clear.

The questionnaire results on socio-economic status do not contribute much. Senior administrators were asked whether parents of higher socio-economic status had more influence (Part II, Question 7). The response frequencies were: usually 2, frequently 3, occasionally 2, seldom 1 and rarely 1. The spread of responses indicates some tendency to perceive that higher socio-economic parents are more influential. Teachers and principals were asked to rate the socio-economic status of their school parent community. The researcher's intention was to ascertain whether there was any correlation with their other responses. However, the very small range in questionnaire responses and the obvious difficulties of respondents in assessing socio-economic status indicated it would not be worthwhile to proceed. For example, one principal pointed to a mixture by checking three responses.

The Uninfluential. Some interviewees drew attention to groups which did not exert influence. First generation immigrants have a language barrier and often cultural norms of accepting the school's authority. They tend "to say," as expressed by one principal: "You're the expert; you decide and you'll have my backing." Natives were another group mentioned and the same principal described their attitude as: "Why are you bothering me?" Another felt natives "feel inhibited and intimidated because they don't know enough." A teacher wrote of her school where the parents' "economic and cultural background" and "language barrier" meant that "Only 75 percent get an understanding of what is happening and of that percentage maybe 10 percent feel comfortable enough to provide feedback to the school and take an active role."

Also mentioned by several interviewees were those who did not have the time to get involved, particularly the rapidly growing group of working single parents. Two interviewees expressed the view that whether the uninfluential remained so, depended on the principal. They maintained a principal, using various techniques, can get any group of parents involved with the school and in a position to influence.

Special Identity Groups. Special identity groups, as they were called by a trustee, are those which have organized in the district to pursue a particular objective. Best known were the language groups -- francophone, immersion French, bilingual

Ukrainian and Polish. As Miklos observed (1982:2), "Culture and language rights have replaced religion as the central considerations in the issue of minority education rights." However, other groups associated with special education (including the gifted) were mentioned at times and early childhood was often singled out for mention. Community schools were only mentioned a few times.

As reported in Chapter 4, language schools were overrepresented in the reputational analysis of schools with good parent relationships but not outstandingly so. Early interviewees were trustees and they frequently referred to the influence of the language groups, possibly because they have to deal with them more. All interviewees were asked whether they thought these parents were more influential. Nearly all thought they were. The greater involvement of parents from these groups was referred to, and their efforts to achieve their objectives with the board. The system-wide committees established by the district for each language, with parent representation from each school involved as well as a trustee and senior administrator, were cited as evidence of their influence.

Reasons given for the greater influence of the language group parents involved the strength of their convictions and their minority status, the personal sacrifice of time and money involved in having their children in special programs, their identification with and organization around a cause, and the sense of school "ownership" that develops. There was also some comment that they tended to be more affluent.

A trustee said: "The alternate program parents are more vocal. Most of them seem to be more influential." And a senior administrator thought there was "no question of a special relationship." A principal observed they "would have to have a greater influence to get what they have." And a teacher had "heard complaints from teachers who left those schools that parents would walk into class without knocking and talk to their child without reference to the teacher." A quote from a staff handbook for a bilingual school indicates the attitude in one language school: "Parents who elect to send their children to this program have these expectations. We as a staff shall attempt to fulfil these expectations."

Constitutional arrangements mean francophones have a unique position amongst special identity groups and they have achieved more in the way of influence. Some interviewees saw the other language groups as taking their cue from them. Because of the way trustees are elected, those with the support of special identity groups have an advantage. The groups themselves exploit the situation through arrangements such as forums where candidates are pressured to declare their intentions. The success of the groups is evidenced by the observation of a senior administrator that the latest election was the first such occasion on which candidates promised to do something for language groups.

There were sufficient comments to indicate there is a degree of concern in the district about the influence of language groups. A trustee spoke of the "extremists" who will "spoil it for all." Several mentioned the language groups who are, as yet, unorganized or making no demands. For example, people of German extraction were said to be the third largest ethnic group in the city and people of Italian extraction form a significant proportion of the Catholic community. A principal spoke of the antagonism between students in a bilingual school and another questioned the motivation of parents: "Sometimes they just want to do something different, to get publicity, and to have the prestige of a child going to that school."

There were only a few interviewees with knowledge of special education but a few comments suggested the same parental pressure can arise there at times, particularly in regard to the gifted. References to community schools as examples of parental influence were sparse.

Special identity group parents exercise more influence; the implication of this is that issues in which parents get emotionally involved can lead to greater and more successful parent attempts to influence. Societal trends to multiculturalism, promotion of minority rights, and encouragement of diversity might lead to even more pressures on districts and schools to cater for more special interest groups. The perception that such groups exert greater and more successful influence, in order to obtain special provision and extra resources, raises questions of equity. As reported later in this chapter, the district has already seen moves for greater anglophone parental influence as a counter to the other language groups. It might be anticipated that principals also will come under increasing pressure to ensure their schools cater for special groups. As Beare, writing about Australia, has noted (1983:152), "Because we are now in a pluralist society, the school principal will repeatedly be in situations where values conflicts are overt and the subject of vigorous manoeuvring from local and national lobby groups."

Summary

Organizational participants believe parents generally place very considerable importance on schools' meeting their expectations. They agree that some parents are more influential than others. There is a relatively small proportion of parents who are active and have qualities which aid their influence efforts, such as articulateness, education, organizational ability and "know how." The size and effectiveness of this group of parents varies amongst schools. These parents tend to be, but are by no means exclusively, the well-to-do. Special interests are an effective mobilizing force for effective parental influence, as evidenced by the language groups in the district. The role of the principal in determining who will influence the school and how much they will, was brought to attention because of their perceived capacity to get parents involved and their mediation of special interest demands. These findings form the basis for the following propositions.

Proposition 42. Parents attach considerable importance to the school's meeting their expectations.

Proposition 43. The more influential parents tend to be those who are active, articulate, affluent, educated, and know how to organize and exert pressure.

Proposition 44. An increasing number of special interests, such as language teaching and cultural transmission, are effectively mobilizing the parental influence faced by school systems and schools.

Proposition 45. Principals can stimulate parents to exert influence by organizing parents and encouraging special interest groups.

PARENT ADVISORY COMMITTEES

The officially sanctioned means for direct parental influence on the principal in the district is the parent advisory committee or PAC. Some of the documentation relating to PACs was examined in Chapter 7 as part of the analysis of direct superordinate influence on the principal with regard to parents. This section examines the remaining documentation and the results obtained from the questionnaire and interviews in order to assess salient characteristics associated with PACs as a means through which parents control principal behavior.

Status and Name

Earlier analysis of documentation and interviews in Chapter 7 established that PACs are promoted by the district as the formal means for parental influence on "school related matters." While it is not mandated that schools must have a PAC and the principal has some discretion, the district strongly encourages their formation, especially at the elementary level. Board support for PACs was noted in Chapter 7, as well as the contents of various publications of the board which would lead parents to expect they could participate through a PAC, and the subtle pressure that comes through enquiries from the chief superintendent's office.

The name "parent advisory committee" or PAC is used here because it was the one most commonly used by respondents. In the latest guideline (103.1, approved 1 November, 1985) the name is "Parent-School Advisory Committee," which is more appropriate in view of the inclusion of "administration and teachers" in the membership. However, this guideline does not seem well-known in the district as there was no reference to it by respondents.

Occurrence

Thirty nine of the forty two principals indicated they had a parent advisory committee. This is higher than average for the district as might be expected of an all-elementary school sample. A number of interviewees commented that PACs were more common in elementary schools where the district focuses its efforts to encourage them.

Questionnaire Results

The perceived influence of the parent advisory committee was explored in a general question to all respondents and in questions directed specifically to principals and teachers.

Part I. Question 3. How important are School Parent Advisory Committees in influencing decision-making by the principal?

The results shown in Table 42 indicate that PACs have an important influence on the principal's decision-making, as for all respondents 91 percent responded "important" or "very important."

A significant group result is the 93% given to "important" and "very important" by teachers since they are in a good position to observe the effects of PAC influence. The 88 percent for principals is high and they are the most involved. The lower ratings given by senior administrators might indicate some scepticism about who influences whom. A trustee wrote in a similar vein that she "Gave '1' because should be . . . but not too sure they are in fact. Lot of people say principal so closely controls agenda that they feel they have no input." And a teacher commented that when parental influence conflicts with principal autonomy, the "principal wins."

Table 42
Parent Advisory Committee Influence
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	N
Trustee	2 (33)	4 (67)	-	-	6
Senior Administrator	-	7 (78)	2 (22)	-	9
Principal	5 (12)	32 (76)	5 (12)	-	42
Teacher	31 (30)	65 (63)	8 (8)	-	104
Total	38 (24)	108 (67)	15 (9)	-	161

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

A staff member who responded with a "2" noted that it would sometimes be "1", depending on the principal, and a senior administrator wrote that "It depends on what matter." A principal stated his position: "My parents understand that I am an agent of the board and that I have the final decision. Their input is sought and does have influence."

Part II. Question 6 (c). Principals. How would you rate the parent group's influence on your decision-making?

Part II. Question 7. Teachers. How would you rate the influence of formal parent groups on decision-making in your school?

The results for these two questions are contained in Table 43. The questions asked for much the same response as Question 3 in Part I and the results, allowing for the five-point scale, seem comparable, with 53 percent of teachers responding with "high" or "very high" compared to 34 percent of principals. If "average" is included the respective figures are 88 percent and 98 percent believing the parent group has at least average influence on decision making.

Table 43
Formal Parent Influence on Decision Making
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Very High	High	Average	Low	Very Low	N
Principals	2 (5)	12 (29)	27 (64)	1 (2)	-	42
Teacher	14 (14)	40 (39)	36 (35)	10 (10)	3 (3)	103

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

The conclusion from the three questions is that PACs do have an important influence on principal and school decision-making.

Teacher Attendance at Parent Group Meetings. Teachers were asked whether they attended meetings of parent groups associated with their school. The responses were: usually 16, frequently 17, occasionally 34, seldom 13, rarely 24. It is difficult to draw conclusions from these results as practice varies amongst schools. In some, only representatives of teachers are expected to attend, in others only the principal and his assistant attend, while in others all staff might be urged to attend. Still, it appears that a considerable proportion of teachers do regard meetings of parent groups as important enough for them to attend.

Interviews and Written Comments

All interviewees were asked for their views on formal means for parental influence on schools, often with the prompt: "Like parent advisory committees."

Principals were also asked about their experience in working with a PAC. Some respondents commented on PACs in completing their questionnaire. The sections that follow draw upon all these sources. Comments are organized under paragraph headings which draw attention to the categorization adopted.

Strong Support. There was generally very strong endorsement for PACs using words like "vital," "very positive," "a necessity," "couldn't operate without," "desirable." However, minorities amongst senior administrators, principals and teachers expressed some reservations. The reservations included observations that: (a) there were equally efficacious alternatives; (b) they were "not to direct, but only to assist"; (c) "they did not interfere in areas that were not their concern"; (d) "it depends on the people on them"; (e) they can vary from school to school, "from none at all to the very sophisticated"; and (f) they may represent only a few parents who "exhibit their personal biases."

Feedback and Sounding Board. The most frequently mentioned advantage of PACs was their usefulness in providing feedback and serving as a sounding board. Two principals' comments illustrate the point: "An excellent check on one's perception of what is happening out there and even though you might not agree, you know how it's something you have to work on"; "Sometimes when you are making changes in various procedures, as a staff you think there are no kinks, but by discussing them with parents in advance you discover things." Feedback also allows for nipping problems in the bud. As a principal said, a PAC gave "opportunity for the more vocal to have their say so that they bring it up at the PAC rather than talking around coffee in the neighborhood."

Cooptation and leadership. Several principals saw an advantage of PACs in having parents control other parents. On his questionnaire, one wrote: "Parent advisories are excellent groups to sway other parents and serve as a sounding board for change." Another said the PAC provided a "good opportunity for other parents to tone down the more vocal, rather than having to do it yourself and getting them on your back." A colleague liked to have in "a couple of challengers, people quick with beefs and bouquets, as this helps establish a parent dialogue, and it's more effective when it's coming from another parent rather than us." When principals were asked if they had any problems with PACs, few said they did, and many referred to building an atmosphere of openness in which they were able to lead. "It's a matter of getting them to see the perspective from school operations . . . . They realize the need when it's explained to them." "Just had to get a level of confidence with them and then it was easy." "If there is an attitude of frankness and they have trust it's okay." "They accept professional leadership."

Building Community and Ownership. PACs can help to build a sense of school community and parent ownership of the school. For example, one principal said he used the PAC to monitor whether there was a "welcome, comfortable, positive" atmosphere in the school, while another thought the PAC made parents feel it was "their school."

Practical Efficiency. Some saw PACs as providing an interest articulation function. That is, they can help to define and channel parental influence. As one senior administrator said, if every parent exerted influence directly, "Administrators could not cope. It would drive them nuts."

Parents were also seen as being of assistance to principal and staff. Mention was made of mutual support, fund-raising, and doing work for teachers.

Political. There were a number of references to the usefulness of PACs for pressuring the district or the city or the provincial department. However, there was divided opinion with regard to the district, as some believed in "working together" while others might encourage parents, and still others took a "do nothing" middle position. There was a common understanding that parents could achieve what they wanted. For example, one principal quoted the case of a parent who wrote to the district (without the principal's encouragement) threatening to himself construct some partitioning in the school which the district had refused to install at that time. Within days the district had the job started.

Checks and balances. A teacher claimed a PAC was necessary to prevent staff getting too complacent and a trustee hinted at parental influence as a check on the self-serving interests of administrators. A teacher wrote at length:

> An active parent advisory committee has a great influence on the responsiveness of the principal and teachers to concerns, expectations and interests of the parents and children. An apathetic or non-existent parent advisory group lulls principals and teachers into carrying out their duties with increasing disinterest in any needs or concerns parents might have. The two groups become 'out of touch' with one another, so to speak, resulting in more disagreements, lack of communication and understanding and general disharmony and lack of support.

A trustee commented that a good principal "covered his ass" with good parent committees.

Schools Without a PAC. Two of the principals interviewed did not have a PAC. While they were not opposed to PACs themselves, they said their parents did not want one and they had satisfactory alternatives. Both stressed that their own accessibility to parents largely negated the need. "Parents could phone and say what they wanted to and know that they wouldn't be crucified." "If you respect what parents are saying then they have to feel part of it." Both conducted general parent meetings at which they got feedback and suggestions. Volunteers were invited for specific tasks or committees. One said he got a lot of feedback in informal contact after the parent-run bingo and he knew of schools with a PAC but poor parent relationships. "I could put names on a piece of paper and have a PAC but it would be wasting the time of the parents with me saying, 'Here's how I want to be patted on the back for what I've done'." Significantly, perhaps, a leading member of the community had phoned early in his tenure to say he would hear if "they" had any concerns.

A teacher from a school without a PAC, however, queried the "unorthodox" situation and wrote: "I can only surmise that it is for the principal to extend autonomy and have greater control over the policies, objectives and the events planned for the school."

Reservations. The most often mentioned reservation about PACs was that their role should be restricted to being advisory, or to the "simple and general." Others referred to their not being involved in specific areas like staffing and evaluation. In contrast, a trustee thought PACs could "question or recommend on any policy affecting the school and the principal is charged with the responsibility of answering them." A teacher said, "There can be a problem if parents think they can tell you what to do. Sometimes some of them think they have that right -- they march in like they own the place." A principal said it was important "they know the staff makes the final decision." A senior administrator stressed, "Its function is primarily advisory in nature; it may take on a much stronger position than advisory in some schools when it is allowed to function in this particular way." A trustee described a case where the principal had to be moved because the PAC "became the executive and was deciding how much paper pupils got and controlling the school finances." In talking of problems with PACs, two principals commented: "Problems arise only when they're a group who can't fully appreciate their mandate, but that can be discreetly handled."; "Problems arise when parents tend to see it as not advisory but as the political arm of the parent community."

Several interviewees queried whether PACs really represented parents; whether, as a principal phrased it, "Those interested enough to be involved do represent the grass roots." A teacher wondered whether PAC members did an effective job of "spreading around what they learn," and a principal was not sure they "get the message back to those they represent." Two cited similar problems with a system-wide committee and a senior administrator thought formal organizations might not be the best way of ascertaining parent thinking. However, a principal who said, "They represent the interested parents. There is a fair-sized body out there which is not represented," described the strategy by which he got the latter involved.

A trustee said the board's position was that PACs have "to operate within a society -- they have to work within the jurisdiction as the board has legal responsibility." Another trustee said, "They should be concerned only with local issues while global matters should be decided at board elections." A senior administrator emphasized, "They don't have a system role."

Principals were asked about problems they had with PACs but apart from general comments about the appropriate role of the PAC, there were few examples given. As in Chapter 6 with the questionnaire results, there was no pattern to matters on which principals had differences with parents. A couple of comments are illustrative: "We did have a secretary/treasurer who had been in the job for ten years and thought the money was his to keep"; "I had some tense moments . . . when the chairman called the area superintendent a liar in a public meeting." One principal described how his PAC had agreed to change its custom of rotating the chair after he pointed out it did not suit him.

The 1982 Survey

The Survey. As part of the 1982 strategic plan implementation, referred to in Chapter 7, the communications officer reported to the board on 7th February, 1983 the results of a survey involving information requested from all schools and interviews with six PAC chairpersons and eighteen principals. Of eighty eight schools supplying information, sixty eight had a PAC. Reasons for not having a PAC were: no volunteers, no identifiable community, too small, parents "do not wish to delegate their rights to a committee." The author judged that about 40 percent were "functioning as viable, effective committees." About half had a written constitution.

Involvement with PACs was predominantly female (70 percent) and 23 percent of those involved, including principals, were staff of the school district. The proportion of parents involved was one parent for every twenty nine students.

Parents. The report refers to the views of the parent chairpersons interviewed.

The chairpersons did not feel sufficiently recognized and asked: "How can we get the principal beyond the fund-raising-tea-and-cookies image of us as parents?" They were conscious of their dependence on the principal for information and the opportunity this provided for manipulation, with decisions made in advance of consultation. For a PAC to be effective they saw the need for "accessible, intelligible, viable and consistent" information, and for being "treated as equals" and "listened to." The chairpersons wanted "to collaborate and participate in the direction of their child's learning at the policy making level." These aspirations reflect those recorded by Wirt (1982:11), for the U.S., where "parents became much more than just the old PTA clique, which had unquestioningly supported professionals to the mid-1960's . . . . It no longer worked to keep them busy with a cake sale to raise money for a classroom projector." In contrast, however, an evaluation of a high school in the district by Alberta Education (1982, Appendix D), indicated sixteen randomly selected parents were happy with the PAC operation.

Principals. The principal interviews had results similar to those found in this study. PACs were favoured but there was concern for the many parents who were unwilling to give the time and effort to participate. The PAC was valued as a "liaison to the community" and a "valuable pipeline for feedback," but it must be advisory with no "power to legislate." Principals wanted "Openness . . . while respecting the rules and responsibilities of professional educators."

Summary. The survey is useful as a confirmation of findings in this study and as a corrective to the bias that results from considering only organizational participants' perceptions. Although the study was conducted four years previously, there are indications parents may not feel they have as much influence as indicated by results in this study. The participation of so many district employees and the recommendation, apparently not accepted by the board, that they be barred from holding the chair, suggest the possibility of PAC influence itself being biased. The views of the PAC chairpersons confirm that the principal can be the critical determinant of the effectiveness of parental influence.

Parent-Student Handbooks

The district encourages schools to distribute an annual parent-student handbook and provides initial assistance in design, content and production. Most have a similar front cover statement of intent: "To foster and develop a close working relationship between the community and the school." Fourteen were gathered for review as schools were visited. Most referred to working with the home and to the purpose of the PAC. Brief descriptions of the PAC generally emphasized promotion of communication and liaison between parents and school. A few provided phone numbers for contacting PAC members, but only one invited parents to "express their concerns regarding school policy by contacting executive members." Constitutional details, if included, were generally similar to the guideline constitution from the pamphlet "School Parent Advisory Committees." However, some made more explicit the support role, e.g., "gain support for school goals," "support and endorse school policies." Only one constitution envisaged a more independent role. It provided for the PAC to: receive reports from the principal on most matters concerning the school and to advise him; represent the school in dealing with the board and province; and receive reports, suggestions and inquiries from parents. The broader role implied in this constitution suggests PACs may test the limitations of their assigned role in the district. The same point was made in Chapter 6 when discussing areas of the school which parents influence, and by the senior administrator who spoke of advisory committees assuming they had powers to make decisions.

A Larger Role

Two incidents illustrate that PACs may not, once organized, be content to accept the "school only" role assigned to them by the district.

Suing the Parent. A principal described how his PAC had decided to support a Statement of Claim against the board aimed at obtaining a legal guarantee of the continuation of Immersion French. The principal was very much in the middle because he sympathized with the cause but thought the method was wrong and told the parents this. He was under pressure from above to defuse the situation, as some saw it "as akin to a child suing its parents -- some found it threatening -- and there were a lot of nasty accusations made." He described it as "An interesting case, but not a pleasant one to experience. Does show the new wave of PACs. In the past they have often been seen as figureheads with a question as to what they actually do. But this case shows the way they will eventually go."

Organizing the PACs. The second incident began in late 1984 with an attempt by a PAC chairperson to organize district-wide meetings of all chairpersons. He claimed to have been stalled in his efforts through regular channels, so went ahead and called the meeting on his own initiative. About thirty chairpersons attended the first meeting and there was a similar number at a subsequent one. In advance of the first meeting the central office wrote to all chairpersons pointing out that the district was not sponsoring it, that the decision to attend was the chairperson's, and that the board had scheduled three forums "to improve communications between the Board and our public." As this incident offered the opportunity for examining attitudes to parental influence, all interviewees were asked what they thought of the incident and the originator of the meetings was interviewed.

The interviews revealed varying perceptions of the originator's motivation, some good and some bad. The originator claimed he had two objectives. First, the board was "remiss in not engaging parents as fully as they can." He wanted more "dialogue, debate, discussion" or, as the invitation to the first meeting stated, "information/ideas/exchange." Second, he wanted a district-level organization of PACs or an anglophone system-wide committee to represent the interests of the majority. Included in the lengthy list of "current issues" and "supplementary topics" on the invitation to the first meeting was "System-wide Advisory Committee." This second major objective was, in part, a response to the establishment of other system-wide committees serving particular interests.

The second notice of meeting indicates some hardening of attitudes and is revealing in the questions asked under the heading "P.A.C. Mandate": "Does your school have a P.A.C.? Does your school principal want one? Who really operates your P.A.C.? The principal or the P.A.C.? Is your P.A.C. perfunctory? Is it a watchdog?"

Trustees were divided in their views on the incident though a majority was not opposed to the idea in principle and one went as far as to say the administration had "panicked". However, one said the board did not want a "big lobby or pressure" group, while another was against a "citizens' group running through the system as a counter to the board." More rejected the need for an anglophone system-wide committee on the basis that the majority did not need such protection, but a couple would not "rule out" the idea. Two highlighted key issues: "Principals are paid to do just that -- bring parents' views forward"; and the other said it was an example of "parental power on the move."

Senior administrators were generally more opposed, though there were exceptions and one described the administration's reaction as "paranoid." Most stressed that PACs did not have a system role, were only advisory, and that the board represented parents generally. Some acknowledged the move originated because of the other system-wide language committees which, through their membership, do have direct access to the board. One specified a key issue, in observing that such committees "Always start assuming powers they were not given and think they're decision making."

Principal comments were diverse though a majority possibly were opposed to the move because parents "shouldn't be dictating," or because of fear of creating "a very powerful or strong group," or because "a school is pretty well unique in itself." One commented: "Downtown just about died when they heard." Most revealing comments were: "They didn't get anybody to go from here. I didn't want it."; "I had no qualms . . . and told them they were free to go"; "It's a sign times are changing and PACs will want more say."

Importance of the Principal

A recurring theme in the data on parent advisory committees was how crucial the principal was to their function and operation. The principal decides whether a school will have a PAC, although parents may indicate they do not want one or show no interest. The principal is seen by superordinates as responsible for controlling or leading the PAC and the constitution, if there is one, normally places the principal in a powerful position to do so. Superordinates insist that the principal is the link and information channel between them and the PAC. For example, the first "Administrators' Bulletin" for the year (16th September,1986) included: "Once your PAC is organized, please send the membership list" to the chief superintendent's office.

The questionnaire data clearly show that organizational participants perceive that PACs have very considerable influence on principals. But an examination of the comments made about PACs, and the reservations expressed, indicates limits to that influence. The predominant perception may be that PACs are a valuable support for the principal in doing his job. That is, an effective PAC helps the principal give leadership to the school community. This highlights the complexity of the two way interactive process with both principal and parents influencing and being influenced. And it also raises the question of leadership as opposed to manipulation and whether the two can be distinguished. Mann (1976:117) commented on this difficulty: "Where professionals have a responsibility for encouraging and stimulating people to do things they might not do unassisted it will always be difficult to know where leadership stops and manipulation begins." The communications officer's survey showed that some parent chairpersons thought the PAC was manipulated by principals and interviewees have been quoted to the same effect. A senior administrator thought the principal was "on top" and not in the middle, as he could get parents to do whatever he wanted. It seems clear that the principal is the critical determinant of whether there is real participation by parents. At the other end of the scale, trustees, senior administrators and teachers cited instances of principals who let parents run their schools. Somewhere between parent domination and principal manipulation lies a balance which the principal has to achieve.

A trustee commented that older principals who were opposed to PACs "were being phased out" by the passage of time. Another said the younger, better principal "covers his ass with good parent committees." This comment is similar to Wayson's (1979) argument that up until the 1960s principals were trained and selected to do a different job. A senior administrator was not the only one to suggest, "Some principals feel a little bit threatened by the idea (of parent participation) as they lack the training and experience to give them confidence." The president of the district's teacher organization thought that, if parents were to participate more in decision-making, then principals and teachers would need in-service training in how to work with them. These comments suggest the importance of the attitudes and capacities of the principal as the determinant of the reality of parental influence. A written comment by a teacher highlights the key role of the principal.

> Formal parent groups (PAC) have very little influence. They are used as fund-raisers and rubber stamps for administrative policies. They can raise issues or questions, give suggestions, etc. but administrators usually have their own agenda, and often even 'staff' the PAC through suggestions to certain parents to run for or form the group.

Good Schools and Parent Support

Some interviewees were asked: "Can you have a good school without parent support?" Almost all said a good school had to have parent support. However, about half qualified their answer by saying that a good school without parent support would be even better with it, and some referred to good schools without a recognizable community because they draw students from all over the city. A senior administrator added the rider, "But that doesn't mean they have the final say in making decisions." But presumably, in order to have the support of parents, a principal has to make some concessions, even if it is only listening to them.

Summary

Parent advisory committees are established in nearly all schools and organizational participants, particularly teachers and principals, perceive they have an important influence on decision making in the school. Interviews revealed strong support for parent advisory committees. Comments indicated predominantly utilitarian reasons for this view, emphasizing their usefulness in assisting the principal in leading the school community and maintaining good relations with the parent constituency. The main concerns expressed about PACs involved their assuming too much power, whether they really represented parents, and their confining themselves to school matters. PACs vary greatly in their effectiveness as a vehicle for parental influence. They are in many ways the creatures of principals. However, PACs, once organized, can assume powers not envisioned for them by the district. The importance of the principal in regard to all aspects of PACs was emphasized but particularly in achieving a balance of real parent participation and influence with other interests arising from the various stakeholders in the school. Principals may need training in working with parents.

The conclusions of this section are contained in the following propositions.

Proposition 46. Parent advisory committees are an important means through which parents influence principal decision-making, but their effectiveness in this role varies amongst schools.

Proposition 47. Effective principal leadership can be enhanced in many ways by the support of a parent advisory committee, particularly if there is genuine parent participation.

Proposition 48. Principals can manipulate parent advisory committees, and their effectiveness as a vehicle for parental influence depends upon the relative priority the principal places on them as a source of influence.

Proposition 49. Once parent advisory committees are organized, principals have to deal with their tendency to expand their role into exerting more influence within and beyond the school.

OTHER MEANS THROUGH WHICH PARENTS INFLUENCE

This section deals with the data on parent contacts with organizational participants. It also makes special reference to early childhood programs and community schools, which have not been dealt with elsewhere, because some respondents mentioned them in regard to parent relationships. The concepts of interaction and bounded discretion are further discussed.

Information Received from Parents

Questionnaire. Principals were asked to rate the frequency with which they received information from parents about their school, and teachers were asked the same question about their work. Earlier, results were presented for questions to trustees and senior administrators concerning how often they received information from parents about schools and principals. The results for these four questions from Part II of the questionnaire (trustees question 5, senior administrators question 6, principals question 5, and teachers question 5) are shown in Table 44. This is a difficult table to interpret in view of the differences in the questions asked and the scope for individual respondent interpretation of the scale. Insofar as the figures are comparable they do indicate what might be expected in that principals perceive themselves as receiving most information, closely followed by the trustees. Principals have the main responsibility for dealing with parents and trustees are parents' representatives. Senior administrators receive less information because dealing with parents is not a major aspect of their work. Teachers normally have only the parents of the children they teach to concern them. They do not appear as a group to receive a lot of information on their work from parents as only 31 percent responded with "frequently" or "usually".

Table 44
Information from Parents
Frequency and Percentage of Responses

Respondent Group	Usually	Frequently	Occasionally	Seldom	Rarely	N
Trustee	1 (17)	3 (50)	1 (17)	1 (17)	-	6
Senior Administrator	-	3 (33)	4 (44)	2 (22)	-	9
Principal	7 (17)	22 (52)	13 (31)	-	-	42
Teacher	7 (7)	25 (24)	43 (41)	16 (15)	13 (13)	104

Key : Figure in brackets is percentage frequency.

The results indicate considerable parent input, particularly for principals and trustees. However, they do not give any indication of the "intensity" of the contacts -- the importance with which they are regarded by the principals, the effort they put into them, and the image they try to present.

Parent Contacts

Parents exert influence through contacts with personnel of the school district including trustees. The data established that they do have these contacts with the four groups of organizational participants selected for this study. Principals and trustees have the most contacts. These contacts can be direct or relayed through others. They can be casual, taking place on any occasion, arranged with a purpose, e.g., an interview or a phone call, or through formally established means such as PACs, LACs, and meetings. Contacts can be for the purposes of encouraging, criticizing, information transmission or socializing. All form part of a web of influence since even simple attendance at a school function has implications for parent support, as one principal pointed out.

Complaints are a special category in that they aim to curb principal or teacher discretion. Principals are perceived as treating parental complaints very seriously. By taking complaints to higher levels, parents are perceived to add weight and urgency to them because of the ways in which principals' superordinates react. Parents can exercise their ultimate right to choose schools. While withdrawal of the child may indicate failed influence, as a threat in a time when children are a scarce resource, it lends weight to parental influence.

Parents increase their contacts with principals and schools by becoming more involved. They are in the school more and have more opportunity to observe what occurs there. This both makes them better informed and better placed to exert influence and gives more opportunities to do so.

Summary. Principals and Trustees report most contacts with parents as they have greatest responsibility for parent relations. However, it is difficult to account for all contacts with parents since there are so many ways in which they can be made and influence transmitted, both directly and indirectly. It is clear, however, that the frequency of contacts is increasing, particularly because parents have greater access to schools. Two propositions are drawn from these conclusions.

Proposition 50. Principals have more contacts, taking many forms, with parents than other organizational participants.

Proposition 51. The frequency of parent contacts with schools is increasing, partly because parents have greater access to schools and are better informed.

Early Childhood

Early childhood was mentioned frequently as an example of a part of the school where parental influence was most pronounced. Part of the explanation for this lies in provincial policy which ties grants to observance of a policy which requires participation of parents in decision-making at the classroom level and in program evaluation (see Alberta Education: 1984a,1985b,1985c,1986a, undated pamphlets "Parent Involvement. An Opportunity for You" and "ECS A Program for Children and Parents"). A local advisory committee (LAC) is suggested by the province as an appropriate vehicle for parent involvement (Alberta Education, 1986). In addition, professional practice and theory very much stress the need to ease the transition of the child from home to school, to involve the parent at the school, and to educate the parent so that the school program is reinforced and extended at home.

Nearly all of the elementary schools constituting the sample for this study have early childhood (K) classes, which normally involves having an LAC "to participate in the planning, development, and operation of the kindergarten programs." However, only twelve of the principals noted they had a Local Advisory Committee for early childhood as a parent group advising them. The acting director of Early Childhood Services for the province, during an interview, suggested that principals generally interpret the guidelines for parent participation (which include the LAC) as mandatory, although they do have discretion to arrange for parent involvement in the way best suited to their own circumstances. So it is probable that all the schools with early childhood have LACs. The failure of so many principals to note the LAC as an advisory group to them reflects a perception that early childhood (K) is not one of the main responsibilities of the principal. Rather, it is seen as an adjunct to the school over which the principal exercises nominal jurisdiction. This was reflected in the complaint of one that early childhood proceeded as though it were autonomous within the school. Similarly, there does not appear to have been any attempt to establish a relationship or link between PACs and LACs.

Two of the teacher interviewees had previous experience in early childhood teaching. They had contrasting views. One wished she could have parents participating as much with her present grade 1 class, as she had found it such an advantage. The other had "found it a pain" because she "couldn't give her best efforts to both parents and children." A teacher wrote: "Since I work in an EC program I have parents in my classroom almost every day. I feel very confident with the program I run and I am continally getting feedback from the parents." The three teachers' comments illustrate the intensity of parent participation. The consequences for parental influence generally are that parents, in effect, are being trained for participation, and are likely to expect it to carry on into primary grades. Two principals referred to this. The province is also sponsoring pilot articulation programs in which the "flow" through the grades is improved and this is likely to encourage continuing parent participation past kindergarten (see Alberta Education,1986b, Guideline 6.1). The term "early childhood" is widely used and seems to be displacing "kindergarten." It implies treating K and the primary grades as an integrated stage of schooling and, presumably, incorporating the parental participation philosophy throughout the stage. A study conducted for the province by Pain (1984a, 1984b) on the effects of parental involvement and articulation supports this view.

The province is also promoting a system advisory committee in early childhood for each district to "permit the sharing of responsibilities and programs which, in turn, prevents gaps and overlaps in services and program activities." (Alberta Education,1986a:1) These are established on an area basis in the district studied. There is also encouragement in the same document for Regional Coordination Committees based on geographic areas so that "there is a network across the province."

This short consideration of early childhood demonstrates how the province may ensure its attitudes to parental influence are reflected in school operations. Chapter 7 revealed the province is not seen by principals and teachers as the major influence on them, but there is an exception in the case of early childhood where the province has a major direct impact which may work its way up through schools. This finding also adds weight to the proposition that parental influence on schools will continue to grow.

However, Early Childhood is not the only area where provincial attitudes are made clear in practice. For example, when evaluating a high school in the district, Alberta Education included two parents on the evaluation panel and gathered the views of sixteen randomly selected parents about the school and its parent relations. The major finding of this section is the following proposition.

Proposition 52. Provincial early childhood policies are a leading edge in the growth of parental influence in schools.

Community Schools

Two of the schools involved in the study are Designated Community Schools which receive substantial additional funding under a provincial program. All questionnaires were returned from these two schools and, for one, both a principal and a teacher were interviewed. Although Sullivan (1976) found more community involvement in decision-making in community schools, only once or twice during the study did respondents refer to community schools and express the opinion that they would exhibit greater parental influence.

The attempt to identify, reputationally, those schools with better parent relationships did not produce any references to community schools. The interviews did not reveal any special characteristics or significance with regard to parental influence that would indicate these schools should be considered separately. This conclusion is supported by a 1981 study of five community schools in the province (Loudon) which found that community school principals did not perceive their role as substantially different. There is no implication that these schools are not achieving the objectives of community schools, which include much more than simply involving parents. Any assessment of their parent involvement would need to be done in the context of their particular situation. In this study no evidence emerged which would require special consideration of the results from community schools.

The impression derived here from the lack of mention of community schools in the context of parental influence is supported by the findings of the latest evaluation of community schools (Harvey,1986). A comparison of fifteen community and fifteen non-community schools found that among a range of respondents only parents and community members thought the community school had greater involvement of parents and community in decision-making. The involvement of parents in advice on curriculum and helping teachers was not high in the community schools. On many other criteria, however, they were doing much better than regular schools.

Interaction

Parental influence may affect any particular decision made by a principal. However, parental influence on principals or schools is not a unidirectional phenomenon. The data indicate that principal and school also exert influence on parents. The outcome in any particular decision will be a result of the accommodation of both influences. A principal's responsibilities include giving leadership to parents. But as leaders, principals must take account of the wishes of those they would have follow, at least to the extent of winning their acceptance. There is interaction between the influence of parents and the influence of principals. This finding is formulated in the following proposition.

Proposition 53. Any of the principal's decisions may reflect accommodation made to parental influence as well as the molding of parent views by the principal.

Bounded Discretion

As established in Chapter VI, another way in which parental influence operates is to mark out the terrain for principals. Parent expectations establish boundaries for the discretion of principals and schools. Selection and socialization may help to internalize these boundaries for principals and teachers, as may learning from experience. Boundaries for school and district discretion may also exist at the provincial level as senior officials of the provincial department of education indicated the department may intervene when there are a lot of complaints. With larger urban districts this may only involve communication with the appropriate officers. Through elections, parents participate in establishing boundaries at the district level. For example, a trustee pointed out that a fellow trustee who divorced and remarried was not re-elected. This phenomenon can be conceptualized as behaviour falling outside the zone of tolerance. Parents bring to attention and force action on serious cases of incompetence or misbehavior. At the classroom level there was the teacher who introduced her own radical religious beliefs or the one who had too many absences. At the school level references were made to schools or principals getting beyond the zone when student discipline became a problem or when excessive charges were introduced for lunch-time supervision of students, or when relations with parents generally are inadequate.

The examples given in the last paragraph are obvious manifestations of parental influence which arise when parents are no longer prepared to tolerate behavior. They were described by a few respondents as negative parental influence. While the formal incorporation of parent opinion in evaluation, assessment, selection, promotion and transfer is not a regular practice of the district, it is widely perceived that parents influence these processes when their opposition is aroused or when they make their dissatisfaction known. Principals recognize this power of parents, and hence go to considerable lengths to demonstrate they have parental support. However, they may also be motivated by other considerations such as the positive advantages to school and students of such support.

This discussion of bounded discretion leads to the following propositions.

Proposition 54. Principals exercise discretion within a context of layered provincial, district, and school community environments, which create boundaries, or a zone of tolerance, the thresholds of which are monitored by parents.

SUMMARY

This chapter has concluded the analysis of the data by examining what the perceptions of respondents reveal about parents and their ways of influencing principals and schools. Parents place importance on schools meeting their expectations. Some parents exert more influence on schools and certain characteristics of these parents can be identified. Socio-economic status is related to the amount of influence exerted by parents and special identity or interest groups exert greater influence.

Most schools have parent advisory committees as the formal means for parental influence and they have considerable influence. There is strong support for these committees which can provide substantial assistance to the principal and teacher, and aid in the establishment and maintenance of productive relationships with parents. PACs tend to move beyond the advisory role at the school level and beyond the school-only role assigned them by the district. The re-election of a trustee who advocates moving to the Home and School Association link may be significant (policy statement in newspaper : see Appendix D).

A newer guideline constitution for PACs indicates the district may recognize a more positive and influential role for these committees, particularly as some principals have utilized their discretion to give PACs a more integral role in decision making at the school level.

The principal is the key to parent advisory committee effectiveness. This power is tempered because parent support is needed if the principal is to do his job most effectively and have the best possible school.

Parents influence schools in a variety of ways, formal and informal, direct and indirect. They have most contact with principals who carry the main responsibility for parental relations. Early childhood programs and their local advisory committees are providing a provincially sponsored leading edge for greater parental influence in schools.

Parental influence operates in a context of interaction with the principal who provides leadership as well as being the gatekeeper to the school and the local representative of the district. The outcome and nature of parental influence are determined by a complex mixture of controls on principals. Parental influence establishes a domain within which principals and schools have discretion to make decisions but the monitoring of the domain and its boundaries, by parents, is increasing with greater parent contacts, particularly with the principal.

The major findings of this chapter have been listed in thirteen propositions.

This chapter concludes the data analysis. The following, and final chapter, summarizes the study, and brings together the propositions as a basis for general conclusions. Recommendations for practice, for future developments, and for further studies are made.

CHAPTER X

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final chapter presents an overview of the study. A brief account of how the study was conceived and a problem defined for investigation is followed by a description of how the investigation was pursued and data gathered and analyzed. The analytic frameworks are described and the propositions derived from the data listed. The second section draws upon the propositions, the analytic frameworks developed in Chapter 6, and the conceptual bases derived from the review of the literature in Chapter 2 to formulate conclusions which are the major findings of the study. An assessment is made of the implications of this study for the theoretical perspectives which were part of the conceptual bases. The chapter ends with an examination of the implications of the study and its findings for practice, research, and methodology.

SUMMARY

The study is described in this section in terms of (a) its rationale, (b) how it was related to the literature and subsequently designed, (c) how it was conducted, (d) how the data analysis was organized, and (e) the propositions derived from the data.

Rationale for the Study

School systems face a dilemma in their apparently contradictory needs to control schools and to give them greater independence. School systems are accountable and need control in order to pursue their own goals and coordinate the activities of schools. On the other hand, political considerations, research on effective schools, and administrative realities indicate a need for greater autonomy for the individual school community. As the principal is the crucial link between the school system and the school community, and bears responsibility for the school, principal behavior is central to resolving the dilemma.

Two studies indicated that the influence of parents on principals might offer insights into how the dilemma may be resolved by the school system. Peterson (1984a) identified a web of controls which effectively constrained principal behavior whilst maintaining considerable discretion at the school level. One of these controls -- the school system's expectation that the school would have community support -- he called an environmental control mechanism. Grassie (1979a) found that, apart from superordinates in the school system, principals attributed most influence on their behavior to parents. The two studies indicate that a school system can utilize the influence of parents to control principal behavior by ensuring principals are responsive to parents. By making more autonomous principals more accountable to their parents, the school system may achieve the control it needs because principals largely determine what happens in schools.

The research problem was to discover whether parents control principal behavior to a significant degree and whether the principal's superordinates encourage and facilitate this control. The major questions derived from the problem concerned (a) whether parents influence principal work behavior, (b) whether their influence on the principal is important for the school, (c) whether the school system facilitates parental influence, and (d) how parents exercise influence.

The Literature

The literature suggested the need for exploratory and descriptive research on principals and their relationships with parents and superordinates because empirically based knowledge is sparse. There is growing influence of parents on schools which can take many forms ranging from direct pressure to monitoring of the thresholds of discretion allowed schools. Principals, because of their strategic placement, interact with parents to establish a balance of influences that satisfies parents and at the same time satisfies the demands of other important constituencies.

Principals' behavior reflects (a) their crucial positioning, (b) the regulation of the pattern of influences on the school, (c) the buffering of teachers and superordinates, and (d) the capacities and dispositions of the individual principal.

School systems give principals considerable autonomy so that they can deal with local exigencies, fulfil system expectations for responsiveness to parents, and at the same time buffer school and system. The complexity of the principal's role requires a finely tuned system of direct and indirect controls. One indirect control is parental influence, which the school system encourages, facilitates, and, to a limited extent, shapes to its purposes. Another control is the school district's reward system which can also reveal what the school system encourages.

Parents want to influence principals whom they perceive as the key to the school. Some are more active in their influence efforts but all, through their acquiescence, allow the school a zone of tolerance, the thresholds of which they monitor.

Schools organizations may not be loosely coupled. They are constrained through the expectations of society and their varied communities. They are not closed to their environments, but are vulnerable and seek to avoid conflict, often by anticipatory regulation of behavior. Principal discretion, while considerable, is bounded by the various influences that have to be accommodated and coordinated. As each school's situation is different and the principal's own attitudes and abilities are an important factor, a contingency approach to managing the school's external relations is necessary.

Study Design

A complex and relatively unexplored problem called for a pilot study with a flexible research design based on an attitude that searching through many conceptual lens might produce useful insights. As people behave according to how they see the situation, perceptions were the appropriate data to gather.

One reasonably large urban school system was chosen for the study because an in-depth examination promised to be more revealing. Only elementary schools were involved because most comparable research has involved such schools and the nature of parent relations may be different for other levels of schooling. The respondents were trustees, senior administrators from the first and second levels in the hiearchy, principals and teachers -- the organizational participants most likely to be informed about the problem. For the first three groups, all potential respondents were approached and, for teachers, three were nominated by the principal from each school.

A questionnaire and a semi-structured interview schedule were constructed, by drawing upon the literature review, a preliminary study, consultation and experience. The questionnaire and schedule were extensively pilot-tested and steps taken to ensure they met criteria for reliability, validity and trustworthiness. Use of the two data-gathering methods, together with analysis of the limited available documentation, allowed for triangulation.

Conduct of the Study

Data were gathered early in the first term of the 1986/87 school year from forty two of the district's elementary schools, using a personal approach where possible. The return rate for questionnaires was high at 89 percent overall (six from trustees, nine from senior administrators, forty two from principals and 104 from teachers), and nearly all those approached agreed to be interviewed. Interviews averaging nearly one and a half hours in length were conducted with all seven trustees, nine senior administrators, thirteen principals and nine teachers. The teacher and principal interviewees were chosen through both purposive and random sampling. Interviews were recorded in notes which the interviewees had the opportunity to correct. All instances of non-cooperation were checked as a precaution against potential bias.

Initial Data Analysis

The questionnaire data were analyzed using frequency counts and percentage frequencies with very limited reference to means and rankings. The interview data were grouped and regrouped repeatedly according to relevance to specific questions and emergent themes. Some limited content analysis was done with documents but their main use was in illustrating points emerging from the other data.

The instrumentation was reviewed on the basis of experience-in-use. The questionnaire was useful for gathering perceptions about parental influence in schools but it was not very discriminating. Refinement could lead to development of a parental influence scale. The interview schedule was adequate for eliciting respondents' perceptions but could be further adapted to provide even more assistance in interpreting some of the questionnaire results.

The main impression from the conduct of the study and the data was that virtually all respondents thought parental influence on principals and their schools was an important topic for study. The general view was that parental influence is significant, appropriate and growing. Differences between respondent groups were not large though there was some suggestion that trustees perceived most parental influence, followed by principals, senior administrators and teachers in that order. The group which seemed to consider parental influence least directly relevant to its own work was senior administrators.

Overall Framework for Analysis

Analytical frameworks were developed for dealing with the data. Their development was an important aspect of the study since they resulted from a synthesis of insights derived from the literature, from experience during the study and from analysis of the data. They proved to be useful for descriptive purposes and in reducing complexity to manageable proportions.

The major framework for the full tripartite relationship (see Figure 1) envisages principal, parents and superordinates nested in overlapping layers of various environments which impinge on the tripartite relationship. This relationship creates one of the school's environments -- parental influence. At the centre is the school, with its teachers very much under the influence of the principal, whose behavior manifests the effects of influences from both parents and superordinates. The principal mediates most external influences on the school.

Parent expectations are important in molding the principal's behavior. Parents monitor whether the school is what the community expects it to be, and press views on the principal through formal and other means. On the other side of the school, because in many ways the school and principal are the district's interface with parents, are the principal's superordinates. Their influence can be direct or indirect and can operate through a reward system which encourages principals to meet superordinates' expectations. With regard to parents, superordinates may encourage the principal to be responsive, while also expecting the principal to ensure that the level and nature of parental influence is acceptable.

Superordinates may encourage parents to exert influence on the principal and they may try to shape the expectations that parents have of the school and principal. Similarly, parents may influence the principal and school through their contacts with superordinates, who in turn bring influence to bear. Or the access parents have to superordinates may make the principal more responsive to parents.

Four more detailed frameworks were the basis for reviewing the data in four data analysis chapters. The first examined the data for evidence of the significance of parental influence on principals, while the remaining three viewed the data from the perspective of each of the actors in the tripartite relationship. Because of the interactive nature of their relationships there was considerable overlap.

Parental Influence

The focus on parental influence (Figure 2) involved its magnitude and whether it has been increasing in its effects on schools. Its nature as a generalized influence defining boundaries of discretion, and in impinging more on some areas of school activities than others, was examined.

The Principal and Parental Influence

Since the principal is at the pivotal point and is the boundary manager, a framework (Figure 3) was developed for the principal. The principal is the key to determining what parental influence there will be on the school. Manifestations of parental influence on principals' behavior may be seen in responsiveness or sensitivity to parents, in efforts to enlist parent support, in the way behavior is constrained, or in buffering activities. Influence of parents on the principal can be translated into effects on school activities. The responsiveness of teachers to parents, the selection and evaluation of teachers, and the transfer and disciplining of teachers may indicate parental influence within the school.

Superordinates and Parental Influence

Parental influence as an environmental control mechanism for the school district is part of the analytic framework from the superordinates' perspective (Figure 4). Superordinates influence principals directly through policies and through overt and implied attitudes and expectations. They encourage principals to be responsive to parents while at the same time expecting principals to manage parents so that school and district are free to pursue their work without unwanted interference. Superordinates may encourage parents to exert influence on principals either directly or through becoming involved with the school. They may endeavour to determine the direction of parental influence by shaping parent expectations of schools. Superordinates may influence the nature of the relationship between parents and principals by less direct means such as their own responsiveness and accessibility to parents, the manner in which they handle complaints, and the behaviors they reward.

Parents and Their Influence on Principals

The analytic framework from a parent perspective (Figure 5) involved parents' attitudes towards influencing schools and indications of whether some parents exert more influence than others. Parents' direct interactions with principals can be influence relationships and include giving advice through formal groups, providing support, being involved, having contact and making complaints. Parents influence principals less directly through superordinates by providing information, being involved in the reward system, petitioning, voting for trustees and organizing to exert influence at the district level.

Propositions

As the data analysis proceeded the following fifty four propositions were extracted. They are the findings.

1. Trustees, senior administrators, principals and teachers perceive that parents exert a strong influence on schools.

2. Senior administrators perceive less parental influence on schools than do trustees, principals and teachers.

3. Parental influence on schools has increased and will become a progressively more significant influence on school administrators.

4. Parents are exerting increasing influence across a wider range of school

operations, but the influence is less acceptable to organizational participants in core teaching and personnel matters.

5. There is a trend towards acceptance of parents' right to advise on any aspect of school life, particularly at the general policy level, and to make decisions in specified areas of school operations approved by the principal.

6. School systems may find advantage in recognizing and legitimizing existing parental influence, particularly with regard to staffing.

7. Differences in opinion may occur between principals and parents on virtually any matter concerning schools, but such differences do not occur frequently, as there is considerable pressure on principals to accept parental influence.

8. The reality for organizational participants is that parents monitor the thresholds or boundaries of the zone of tolerance, and the discretion which the community unconsciously allows schools

9. The boundaries established for a school are not inflexible and they can be altered through the communication skills of the principal.

10. Principals' work behavior reflects considerable effort to demonstrate they have the support of their schools' parents.

11. Principals are highly responsive to parents, sensitive to parent wishes, and try to keep parents satisfied with their schools.

12. Superordinates expect principals to resolve parent problems without superordinates' being involved, and principals see it as in their own interests to do so.

13. Teachers expect their principal to manage parents in the interests of the school and teachers' work.

14. Parents exert considerable influence on teachers and their work.

15. Principals are becoming more involved in selecting their teachers, partly because principals can be the means through which parent preferences influence the selection process.

16. Principals are increasingly concerned with ensuring that staff are responsive to parents.

17. Parents play an important informal role in teacher evaluation and this will lead to a more openly recognized role for them.

18. The principal largely determines the extent and nature of parental influence on teachers' work and allied matters.

19. The principal is of great importance to, and is responsible for, the school.

20. Parents regard the principal as, in effect, the school.

21. Principals have very considerable discretion in doing their job, though they are subject to various controls including parental influence.

22. The amount of discretion principals have means that parental influence on principals can significantly affect schools.

23. Part of the principal's role is to promote parent support for superordinates' policies.

24. Principals are frequently unaware of their potential discretionary power and they probably exercise discretion more than they realise.

25. A major function of the principalship is to reconcile the interests of superordinates, teachers and parents in order to establish the balance which is best for achievement of school objectives.

26. The principal decides how much and what influence parents will have in the school.

27. The parent-principal relationship is interactive with each influencing the other.

28. Superordinates strongly promote school responsiveness to parent expectations.

29. Superordinates' actions are often based on expediency as well as commitment to the concept of parental influence.

30. The school district uses parental influence to control principals.

31. Principals, who have the responsibility for managing parents' influence on the school, feel superordinates' attitudes towards parental influence constitute a control on principal behavior.

32. Parental influence constitutes a control on districts and schools for the province.

33. Well understood expectations within the school district exert pressure on principals to allow parents to influence their schools while at the same time ensuring parental influence is appropriately constrained.

34. Expectations both to accommodate and manage parental influence are conveyed to the principal through district publications; implications of various policies, guidelines, actions and programs; as well as through direct interaction with superordinates.

35. Representatives of parents (i.e.,trustees) seldom influence principals directly.

36. Parent access to superordinates is a recognized but irregular, and often informal, means of monitoring principal behavior.

37. Superordinates regard parents as the principal's responsibility and they make this attitude clear to principals.

38. Principals perceive that superordinates attach considerable importance to complaints from parents, particularly if a trustee is involved.

39. Complaint handling by superordinates demonstrates they expect priority will be given to parent concerns and that the principal will satisfy parents.

40. The district reward system, in the form of school evaluation, promotion, and principal assessment and transfer, reflects parental influence, especially in the negative sense of barring access to rewards.

41. Parents influence principals by affecting the rewards available, but the

nature and extent of this influence is largely determined by senior administrators who control the reward system.

42. Parents attach considerable importance to the school's meeting their expectations.

43. The more influential parents tend to be those who are active, articulate, affluent, educated, and know how to organize and exert pressure.

44. An increasing number of special interests, such as language teaching and cultural transmission, are effectively mobilizing the parental influence faced by school systems and schools.

45. Principals can stimulate parents to exert influence by organizing parents and encouraging special interest groups.

46. Parent advisory committees are an important means through which parents influence principal decision-making, but their effectiveness in this role varies amongst schools.

47. Effective principal leadership can be enhanced in many ways by the support of a parent advisory committee, particularly if there is genuine parent participation.

48. Principals can manipulate parent advisory committees, and their effectiveness as a vehicle for parental influence depends upon the relative priority the principal places on them as a source of influence.

49. Once parent advisory committees are organized, principals have to deal with their tendency to expand their role into exerting more influence within and beyond the school.

50. Principals have more contacts, taking many forms, with parents than other organizational participants.

51. The frequency of parent contacts with schools is increasing, partly because parents have greater access to schools and are better informed.

52. Provincial early childhood policies are a leading edge in the growth of

parental influence in schools.

53. Any of the principal's decisions may reflect accommodation made to parental influence as well as the molding of parent views by the principal.

54. Principals exercise discretion within a context of layered provincial, district, and school community environments, which create boundaries, or a zone of tolerance, the thresholds of which are monitored by parents.

These propositions form the basis for the main conclusions drawn in the following section.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has endeavoured to avoid Perrow's criticism (1982:686) that "we do not peer fearlessly into that awful pit of tautology, of lack of independence between our measure, of multicollinearity baked right into our very concepts." The study commenced with a simple notion that principals' superordinates control principal behavior, partly by ensuring principals are responsive to parental influence. Such propositions cannot be artificially separated from their context. But the more that context was considered, the more difficult became the problem of constraining the scope of the inquiry. This problem could only be partly resolved by thematizing the data to identify the most significant phenomena and by relying upon the literature as a guide.

Perrow goes on to write: "We rarely ask of the conclusion of a study, would anyone have seriously argued otherwise." That question might be asked of the conclusions which follow. However, in defence, it might be said that there is worth in describing the obvious, if only as a basis for comparison in the future. This study shows that parental influence on schools is perceived to have grown significantly, but how much is difficult to say because there is no yardstick. Also, Perrow assumes a unanimity which is rarely found. Although the findings are generally consistent with conclusions drawn from the literature review in Chapter 2, it would not be difficult to find those who would dispute the conclusions of this study.

Qualification of the conclusions lies in the data which gave rise to them. Merriam (1985:11) quotes MacDonald and Walker to make the point nicely: "At all levels of the system, what people think they are doing, what they say they are doing, and what they appear to others to be doing, and what in fact they are doing, may be sources of considerable discrepancy." The conclusions here are based on what the major organizational participants in the school district reported they perceive concerning elementary schools. Evidence has been cited that parents on the outside may see things quite differently. And even amongst the organizational participants conclusions can only be drawn on the basis of numbers -- if more tend to perceive in a certain way then this is taken to be the general state of affairs with minority dissenting views neglected.

The conclusions begin with the simple axiom, following the definition of the problem in Chapter 1, that parental influence constitutes a significant control over principal behavior in the elementary schools of the district studied, and that parental influence is fostered as a control by principals' superordinates. Unrecognized policy change, as described in Chapter 2, has occurred. The four sections which follow are consistent with (a) the four major questions derived from the problem in Chapter 1, (b) the first four divisions of the conceptual bases section derived from the literature in Chapter 2, (c) the sub-questions developed in Chapter 3, and (d) the four analytic frameworks (Figures 2, 3, 4 and 5) described in Chapter 5 as elaboration of the inclusive framework (Figure 1). The evidence cited is from the propositions derived from the data. There is some repetitiveness because in classifying data according to the perspectives of the three actors in the tripartite relationship, the same phenomenon is often examined from more than one perspective.

Parents as an Environmental Control

The importance of parental influence for schools was clearly recognized by respondents, as indicated in the following conclusions drawn from the data.

Parents strongly influence principal work behavior. All groups of organizational participants perceived this. Principals' differences with parents tend to be minimal and when they occur are regarded as very important. Principals are very responsive to parents, sensitive to their concerns and try to ensure parents are satisfied. The efforts principals make to ensure they can demonstrate parental support imply they are receptive to parental influence. However, principals do have to find a balance amongst the various influences on them and in doing so determine just how much influence parents have and what form it takes.

The influence of parents on schools has increased. There are indications parental influence will continue to increase because of the continuing existence of the factors stimulating its growth. Amongst the many reasons for the increase is the district's encouragement of principal responsiveness to parents.

Parents influence principal behavior in many ways. Parents act as the monitors of various environments for the school, some of which they help to establish. They ensure thresholds of the zone of discretion or tolerance allowed the school are not crossed or, through interaction with the principal, realign the boundaries. The trend is towards parents' having a right to advise on any matter concerning the school, provided it is at a general policy level, and to their being allowed decision-making responsibilities in a growing range of matters. However, their influence on specific, technical core and personnel matters is by no means fully accepted, although it is clear they can bring about changes in, for example, specific staffing arrangements. Parents operate in an interactive context with principals. The latter seek to mold parental influence so that it is acceptable to other parties, and to shape the zone of tolerance allowed by parents. Despite these qualifications, however, it is clear that parents do influence principals and are an environmental control on principal behavior.

Expectations of Principals and Behavioral Effects

A number of conclusions drawn from the data show that principals respond to the expectations of parents and to other groups' expectations of how they should relate with parents. Influence on principals can be reflected in the school.

Principal behavior manifests the influence of parents. Principals devote considerable effort to demonstrating they have parental support and they try to maintain that support by avoiding conflict with parents, by being responsive, and by seeking to satisfy parents. Resolution of any disagreement with parents is given priority as the principal feels under pressure. Parental complaints are taken seriously by principals and they respond to them by seeking solutions which forestall superordinates' being involved. Principals are the main contact point for parents with the school and school system and have a representational role to perform for parents in matters such as staffing. A major task of principals is ensuring staff responsiveness to parents. Senior administrators perceive a little less parental influence on principals because they see the relationship more from the alternative view -- principals influencing parents.

Parental influence penetrates the school and teachers are affected. Teachers feel their work is influenced by parent expectations and acknowledge there is pressure to be responsive to parents. Organizational participants believe parental influence should have less effect on core teaching and personnel matters and expect the principal to manage parents in order to ensure their influence is constrained. Parents sometimes have a significant, but informal, influence on teacher selection and appraisal, especially in cases of inadequate performance. Parents are recognized as contributing informally to school and teacher evaluation.

Influence on the principal has significant consequences for the school. Principals are responsible for the school and can affect virtually any aspect of its operations. Parents perceive the principal as able to determine what occurs in the school and want it to be that way. Principals have freedom in discretionary decision making, both officially and through circumstances, but do not always recognize or exploit it. However, their discretion is circumscribed by various controls on their behavior. Parents are a control through their direct influence on the principal and because they monitor the thresholds of the acceptable. Principals recognize their behavior is monitored from the outside and, to avoid conflict, monitor the thresholds from within.

Principals have to achieve a balance between superordinate and parental influences in the interests of the school and teachers. Principals are expected by superordinates to be responsive to parents and to resolve parent concerns. Parents are the principal's responsibility. It is well understood by principals that they must both promote and constrain parental influence and these expectations are conveyed to them by superordinates in a variety of ways. Principals are also expected to build positive district relations with parents.

Achieving a balance of parental influence with other requirements entails educating and managing parents. If the principal has adequate communication skills, parents may be persuaded to accept school and system proposals. By organizing and encouraging parents the principal can increase their capacity to exert influence. The effective operation of parent organizations depends on the principal's attitudes and actions. The principal can make parent bodies into a powerful source of support but can also manipulate them. And superordinates expect that the principal will contain parent bodies' tendencies to exceed the role envisaged for them. Principals interact most with parents and those interactions are the basis for both accommodations to parents and molding parental influence.

Superordinates and Parents as a Control

That parental influence is part of the school district's control system over principal behavior, is made clear from the following conclusions.

Parental influence is part of the school district's principal control system. Organizational participants perceive superordinates using parents to influence principal behavior, and principals perceive parental influence as a contraint fostered by the district. Strong and well understood expectations, conveyed through a variety of means, pressure principals to be sensitive to parents' needs and preferences and this is reflected in principals' efforts to show they have the support of parents. Superordinates make clear that parents are the principal's responsibility and that it is the principal who has to satisfy parents. The handling of parent complaints by superordinates carries clear implications for the principal. Principals are given discretion so they can achieve the balance of parental influence most appopriate for their situation, and meet school system expectations. Superordinates are subject to supra-system controls and the attitudes they convey to principals are in part a reflection of these. The provincial early childhood arrangements are a good example of how the province fosters parental influence.

The school district reward system encourages principals to be receptive to parental influence. Principals believe, and organizational participants perceive, that the evaluation of schools, and principal assessment, promotion and transfer, are influenced by parents. Principals try to keep problems with parents from superordinates. There are well-known examples of what happened to principals and teachers who could not maintain satisfactory relations with parents. However, the reward system is controlled by superordinates whose concept of appropriate parent relations includes an expectation that principals will manage parents in the interests of the school system.

Superordinates encourage parents to exert influence on schools. Through publications, policies and exhortation, the school system directly encourages parents to become involved with, and to influence, schools. Less directly, there are the expectations of principals that they will have parental support. Superordinates are accessible to parents and this encourages parents to exert influence but, because they mainly deal with complaints, superordinates may perceive less parental influence on schools. Superordinate encouragement of parents is guided by their understanding of what constitutes appropriate influence and they place responsibility on the principal for ensuring parents conform to this understanding.

Superordinates do little to shape the directions of parental influence on principals. Little evidence was found of superordinates' endeavouring to mold parent expectations of their children's schools, although organizational participants consider it important that they do so. Superordinates do make clear that the principal is to respond to parents and that parents have a role in schools. However, they have neglected their own role in forming parent expectations, possibly because parental influence tends to be conservative. Senior administrators do not regard working with parents as an important aspect of their work. The district has made some limited efforts to influence parent expectations: (a) notable achievements are lauded as examples; (b) some forums have been held to show the video "Working Together" and for trustees to discuss educational subjects, submitted by PACs, with parents ("School Bulletin," 1st April,1985); (c) aims are publicized (for example, a copy of Policy 100 is displayed in each school); and (d) various documents are made available to parents.

Nature of Parental Influence

A focus on parents, led to the following conclusions from the data.

Because organizational participants perceive that parents place importance on their expectations of the school, schools try to reflect parental preferences. Responses indicated that there is a widely shared belief that the expectations of parents generally are important both for the parents and for schools. This belief forms a general basis for influence by all parents as schools endeavour to meet these expectations.

Some parents have more influence than others. Only a proportion of parents are active in attempts to influence principals, and success seems to be associated with articulateness, better education, affluence, knowledge of how to organize influence efforts and understanding of the politics of influence. The most influential parents are those who have a commitment to a particular purpose such as bilingualism and heritage preservation. The commitment, often backed by financial investment, leads to strong emotional involvement.

Parents exert influence on and through principals. The literature indicated parents prefer to exercise influence through direct contact with principals and the school. This study showed that principals have the most contacts with parents. The principal is the key to parental influence because (a) of parents' perception of the power of the principal, (b) the principal is in a position to determine the success of influence efforts on the school, and (c) principals want parent support and this gives parents a basis for influence. However, parents also act as monitors of the school's compliance with the expectations of various environments. They establish and maintain a zone of discretion for the principal which the principal also monitors from the inside. A principal with the requisite abilities can interact with parents to alter that zone but in doing so acknowledges their influence.

Parental influence takes a number of forms. The trend is towards an advisory role for parents on virtually any matter concerning the school, provided it is a matter of general policy rather than specific cases involving individuals. There is also a trend, seen in some schools, to allow parents to make decisions across an increasing range of matters. Contacts with principals and teachers allow parents to influence and contacts are increasing as parents become more involved with schools which are increasingly open to them. Parent advisory groups are an important mode of parental influence although their effectiveness tends to vary amongst schools according to the attitudes of the principal. The balance struck between receptivity to influence and molding parents to support the principal's wishes is a function of the individual principal. Teachers are aware of, and try to meet, parents' expectations. Informal evaluation of teachers and operation of the district's reward system give parents influence because parents are perceived to supply information that affects results. Most apparent are parent successes in having principals and teachers removed, or in blocking appointments. Parent access to superordinates gives them a basis for influence, possibly more perceived than real, but accentuated by superordinates' responses. Regardless of personal beliefs about the role of parents, superordinates will try to avoid conflict. In their efforts to exert influence parents encounter opposing influences which try to channel and constrain their efforts.

This section described the conclusions of the study in relation to the problem and major questions derived from it. The following section relates the findings to the concepts drawn from the various theories discussed in Chapter 2.

ASSESSMENT OF THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

In Chapter 2 theories about schools as organizations were described. From them, and from the review of the literature on parental influence and the relations amongst parents, principals and superordinates, ten propositions or conceptual lens were formulated which helped guide development of the study and interpretation of the data. This section reports on the implications of the study for each of the ten.

Couplings

The concept of loosely and tightly coupled organizations appears to have outlived its usefulness. The classification of education systems as loosely coupled, in the sense that schools are not tightly constrained by controls, is not borne out by the findings of this study. Parental influence is, for organizational participants, a significant system-fostered control on principal behavior, and principals have substantial control of what happens in their schools. It has not been unusual to find in the literature claims that schools are loosely coupled to their districts because traditional controls such as supervision are weak, and to proceed from there to the implication that schools are not tightly controlled. In fact, as the sameness of schools would imply, they may be tightly constrained, but not by the sorts of couplings on which the original loose coupling theory was based. This study has shown how parental influence can be a strong coupling or control. There were suggestions in the data of other strong couplings such as selection of principals internally, socialization and the reward system. Attention should be focussed on which couplings are operative, how strong they are and what the effects of the pattern of couplings are. The pattern is important because couplings or controls interrelate so that the total effect is greater than might be assumed when each is examined separately.

Also, it appears from the data that the pattern will vary for each school, largely as a function of the administrative style adopted by the principal in response to the demands of the situation. That is, individual schools within the one school system, may vary widely in the degree to which they are controlled.

Societal Legitimation

While there is some evidence that schools receive their legitimation by being what society expects them to be, they are much more open to intervention than the concept of societal legitimation implies. The concept only partially explains the situation of schools with regard to their environments.

Principals concern themselves with the school's image and are eager to demonstrate they have the support of parents in order to maintain legitimacy. Parents do intervene when the school appears to abrogate the norms established by society. There was evidence of the logic of confidence -- the assumption that each is doing his job -- and the accompanying "face" work or mutual protection (Meyer and Rowan,1978:101). Principals protected both teachers and their superordinates even when the former were in error, and superordinates made clear to parents that the principal was in charge and problem resolution was a matter for the principal to handle.

However, society constitutes only one of the environments impinging on the school. Others include the particular community, the parents, the profession, the district and the province. Schools are highly penetrated. Principals, to maintain the legitimacy of the school, have to cope with diverse environments and not just meet the ritual classification norms which Meyer and Rowan propose as the sole basis for societal legitimation. Principals must deal with influences from a variety of constituencies, not just a general society, and particularly they must satisfy the parent community. In this sense, schools are under close supervision by parents who constitute a control mechanism for the district and province.

In sum, while achieving legitimation through conformity to the norms established by society is important for schools, this is not the only legitimation they need to maintain. Schools have to be responsive to various constituencies.

Vulnerability

Schools are vulnerable to their environments and this vulnerability has significant implications. Organizational participants feel vulnerable to parent interventions though most describe the relationship in more positive terms. For the profession, a shift in attitude is underway. There is growing acceptance of parents as part of the school with a "we" rather than "them" and "us" attitude. The vulnerable school may now be the one which does not have parent involvement and participation. Principals still know there are thresholds to what they can and cannot do -- they cannot upset parents too much -- and so anticipatory constraint on behavior is a norm. However, there is more willingness to work with parents, and as their representative, and to seek agreement on boundaries of discretion adjusted to better meet local needs. Sometimes principals work with parents in order to have other constraints such as those imposed by the district adjusted.

Monitoring

The monitoring concept usefully describes one way in which parents influence schools. Parents are concerned with ensuring principals do not overstep the limits of the acceptable. They are kept aware of what goes on in schools by their children. They want to be better informed. Increased school efforts to communicate with, and involve parents is recognition of their monitoring role. Similarly, principals watch boundaries to ensure the school conforms with parental expectations and that conflicts are avoided. Superordinates monitor how well a school or principal is doing, partly through the information received from parents. Teachers and principals are keenly aware of the presence of parents in the school and that they are being observed.

Discretion

Principal discretion is important for understanding the influence parents have on the school, how principals cope with the unique situation each faces, and how the role of parents in schools is changing. Principals are perceived to have considerable discretion, but it is clearly bounded discretion and there were indications that, like Wolcott's subject (1973), many principals were not inclined to test the boundaries. As Alexandruk (1985:15) says, life can be comfortable in a centralized system where blame can be delegated upwards. Discretion at the principal level was evident, however, in the wide variation in parental influence in schools ranging from those where the parents reportedly ran the school, to those where their participation was virtually nil. Repeatedly the point was made that parental influence depended upon the individual principal involved. As more principals allow more influence they are, through practice, establishing district policy.

Interviews and the questionnaire results indicated that some schools had far more parental influence than others. PAC constitutions confirmed that the situation varied amongst schools. Principals largely decide how much influence parents will have, and principals need discretion in order to be responsive to parents and to fashion a balance of influences that suits the particular school's circumstances and the principal's personal capacities and dispositions. It is also clear that principals have sufficient discretion for parental influence on them to affect the school.

Environments

Because schools have multidimensional, interacting, interdependent and at times ephemeral environments, whose only reality is in the perceptions of those influenced by them, a study focussing on environments can encounter difficulties. The difficulty is highlighted when main actors like parents and superordinates can be both organizational insiders and environmental outsiders. To complicate matters further, the school can be viewed as having an internal environment which the principal both creates and has to deal with. It may be more useful to be more specific about what influences whom. The important influences for the principal are superordinates, teachers, parents and personal predilections. The principal is a boundary manager, situated at the primary exchange point, and with the responsibility of establishing balance amongst these influences and hence, for creating the environment for the school. Other influences may become salient at times.

Interaction

As influence is seldom a one-way process, interaction is a key concept for understanding parental influence as a control on principal behavior. While parents exert influence, the magnitude, nature and direction of that influence is partly a product of the principal and district's influence on parents. Similarly, principals' pursuit of parent support involves concessions to parent views as well as educating parents to accept principals' views. The situation is similar between superordinates and principals and between superordinates and parents. Consequently, the concept of buffering should be understood in the sense that a buffer absorbs shock and gives ground as well as stopping the action. It is not simply protection.

Balance

When the focus is on the principal's role the key concept is balance -- achieving that mixture of influences which best suits the principal's purposes. The best principals will seek the balance which most facilitates pursuit of the school's objectives. Virtually all the theories discussed in Chapter 2 can be seen in terms of balance. Political economy stresses the balance between self-interest and organizational interests. Balance theory is about getting the right style to suit community, school and principal. Street level bureaucracy is about the balance amongst expectations, the realities of what can be done, and self-interest. Representational theory is concerned with the balance of delegate and trustee orientations. Couplings are concerned with the balance of loose and tight most appropriate to the circumstances. Societal institution theory is concerned with the balance of meeting societal expectations while being free to pursue the work of the school.

It is clear that the principal is responsible for achieving the balance of keeping parents satisfied while meeting school system expectations, and demands from the internal constituency. In requiring the principal to be responsive to parents and to keep them satisfied, while at the same time expecting the principal to be a buffer for school and school system, superordinates place responsibility for finding a balance on the principal. Principals must balance their own personality with the needs of the situation, and their use of discretion with the need to keep constituents satisfied.

Contingency

Because the situation for each school is unique, the parent clientele differs amongst schools, and principals themselves differ in abilities and attitudes, a contingency concept is needed to explain principal effectiveness. Principals have to find an administrative style which accommodates and makes best use of the significant interests in a situation and one which they are capable of adopting. The concept of balance is very similar to that of contingency. A contingency approach means seeking the right balance. Similarly it can involve deciding how much discretion to use or how much must be conceded in interaction.

Self-interest

Pursuit of self-interest is a concise answer to the complexity of motivation but involves more than the reward system. Individuals do pursue their self interest. Principals were perceived as establishing appropriate relations with parents in their own self-interest. Parents can exert a powerful influence with which principals must come to terms if they are to retain their positions, avoid problems and win advancement. Difficulty arises with the concept because it is not always clear how the individual perceives his or her self-interest. The reward system is important in capitalizing on individual pursuit of self-interest and in leading, for example, to the selection of principals who can work with parents. But it may not be as clearly relevant when an individual sees self interest in not pursuing the obvious rewards. The 'quiet life' may be a reward for some and this can be a significant basis for parental influence.

The most important aspect of the reward system revealed in this study was the penalties associated with not getting on with parents -- an aspect not generally classified as an incentive or reward.

This section described the implications of the study for concepts listed as theoretical perspectives in Chapter 2 by relating them to the findings. The following section draws some implications from the findings for practice, theory and methodology.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This final section of the thesis makes some recommendations for the practice of administration in school systems and schools, for the conduct and direction of future research, and for research methodology. The study was based on just one school district and the limitations described in the first chapter make clear the dangers of generalizing. However, the results of this study bear some resemblance to studies conducted elsewhere, as described in the literature review. And current developments in comparable countries which are endeavouring to formalize a significant role for parents in school governance suggest recognition of parental influence.

Trustees, and some other respondents, claimed that the Catholic nature of the district meant schools had a special parent relationship. However, the study did not reveal anything to suggest it was markedly different from other school districts with regard to parents. The reasons may be that: (a) it is fully funded by the public; (b) a proportion of its students are non Catholic (estimated 5 percent three years previously : De Groot,1986. Appendix D); (c) the Church plays no direct role and less than half the student body is engaged in parish activities (De Groot,1986. Appendix D); and (d) the prevalence of mixed-marriages (45 percent : Laplante,1981) means its parent clientele is rapidly becoming even more similar to that of public school systems.

Evidence for a special parent relationship was difficult to find elsewhere. The Alberta Catholic School Trustees Association conducted a conference on the principalship. In the "Advanced Readings" (1982) contributors identified little that was different about being a principal in a Catholic school, other than some mention of religious leadership and one claim that greater involvement in the parish allowed more contact with families. However, during this study, a respondent claimed that contribution to the parish was no longer a criterion in principal selection. The Trustees Association's pamphlet, "Serving Catholic Education," mentions that the school complements the home, and in the mission statement says principals have a responsibility to parents, as well as to the government and bishops. There is nothing about parents in the Association's objectives.

Practice

The results of this study help to fill out the description of a significant aspect of school administration. Not only is this aspect important for the three sets of actors involved, but current effective schools research confirms a long held, though perhaps little practised, belief that the best results for the child are achieved through close association of home and school. Achieving that association with parents who expect something more than a support role, because societal trends and their own education tell them they should have it, should be a major objective of school systems. As Iannaccone (1980:208) wrote: "Since the fundamental illusion of the dominant myth (professional neutral competency, etc.) in the politics of education is losing its adequacy, the traditional terms of the relationship between experts and clients are subject to complete renegotiation."

The effective schools research also emphasizes the importance of an older idea, well known in the United Kingdom, for example, that a good school, under strong leadership, develops an identity of its own; which means it meets the particular needs of its clientele and has a mission, or ethos, or climate, or culture which strongly binds all concerned to a common purpose. Such thinking reinforces arguments for school autonomy under strong principal leadership. Yet school systems do need some control of schools. They have to coordinate so that resources are shared equitably, student transfer is facilitated, best use is made of available resources, and so on. And they have to set at least the general directions for schools as well as ensuring they meet provincial requirements. A better understanding of just what determines practice in schools, and of how the needed control can be achieved without losing the advantages of local autonomy, is required.

Instead of lagging behind practice, expressed policies procedures and guidelines with regard to parents should reflect at least the actual situation, if not the ideal, in order for the school system is to provide leadership. This is Laplante's position (1985) in describing what Catholic education in Alberta should be. For example, the approved role statement for a principal in the district studied gives little indication of the major influence-balancing function which this study has revealed. The principal is simply required to work in a collegial manner to fulfil expectations as an educational leader, a religious and moral leader, and a manager (guideline 109.1, Policy Guideline and Administrative Procedure Handbook). The only possible allusion to parents in the elaboration of this three-fold role is reference to meeting the needs of the community and to developing "that climate within the community which fosters its growth as a Catholic community." Some indication of the preferred principal role with regard to parents, in view of the importance of the relationship, could be helpful.

Tkach (1983:366) has argued that school authorities cannot leave leadership to the principal. A better description of the desired parents/principal relationship might help to counter the temptation to be the "good, quiet cog in the wheel . . . keeping a low profile" and "the boys upstairs off your back" that Temple wrote of (ACSTA,1982). Significantly, the Alberta Teachers Association (1985) seems to have a fairly progressive attitude with regard to parent involvement if its position paper on "Administration of Schools" is any indication.

Comments made on the principal's job description also apply to area superintendents, as their statement of duties has no reference to parents (Area Arrangements,"1982 : Appendix D). The analytic frameworks from Chapter 5 could serve as a basis for a more useful description of both principals and superintendents' work with regard to parents.

This study found in practice in some schools, and in the attitudes of most organizational participants, that the form of parent involvement approached Sullivan's (1976:37) fifth form: "accountability to parents and community members for policy decisions"; and in some instances even resembled his sixth: "lay control of educational decisions." The latest model constitution for a Parent-School Advisory Committee (guideline 103.1) shows some recognition of the principal's accountability to parents but is still fairly tentative. A firmer statement of policy might achieve local accountability more rapidly in all schools and reap the benefits Gittell (1977:21) claims for a closer "relationship between school professionals and the community" which will convince "teachers they must be responsible to clients as well as to their professional peers." It might also hasten movement towards the ideal of consummative rather than instrumental participation of parents in school governance (Bryden,1982). Promoting an equivalent level of parental influence for all schools might reduce the inequity that arises when those who exert the most influence and tend to receive more are drawn predominantly from a particular strata of society.

In effect, school systems should work towards strengthening school accountability to parents, especially as various developments preclude their enforcing direct school accountability to the system. This poses the question of how, under such circumstances, the school system fulfils its own responsibilities. It can do so by working more with parents itself and by shaping their expectations of schools. Senior administrators, in particular, should assume a much greater responsibility as educators of parents along the lines argued by Cuban (1985). The responsibility for educating parents should not be left almost wholly with principals, especially as they become more accountable to parents. The system might also work towards being a model of accountability itself by structuring formal means for working with parents at all levels, rather than assuming trustee elections provide sufficient parent participation. The representational efficacy of trustees has been seriously questioned and there seems little chance of consummative participation by parents under present arrangements. Such changes may be a matter of survival since public education systems need to mobilize their most obvious source of support in times when those with children in schools are rapidly declining as a proportion of the tax-paying population (see Mort,1986 : Appendix D).

Open recognition of the actual influence of parents, through formal provision for their participation, might well lead to advantageous change. For example, parents influence staffing matters, and are believed to do so by those in schools. This creates some cynicism and antagonism which a more open involvement might dispell, and might also make parents more responsible for the power they wield. In particular, parents might well be given some role in selection of their principal. It is principals that parents want to influence as they see them as the key to the school. Parent involvement in principal selection would emphasize the representational role of the principal for parents.

The importance of the principal to all aspects of the school and its relationships with various constituencies has been a repeated theme throughout this study. It is clear that for improved schools, better principals are required. Principal performance can be improved in two ways. One is by selecting better people, which essentially means widening the range from which to choose. Internal promotion, which tends to perpetuate existing attitudes, may have to be modified if principals are to be found who will exploit their discretion to build individual school community identity. Second, principals can receive better pre-service and in-service preparation for their role. However, simply concentrating training efforts on principals is unlikely to be sufficient. Attitudes towards parent participation have to change throughout the school system. As long as there are substantial numbers of the staff who feel threatened by parent participation, especially if they occupy positions of power, a genuine partnership will be difficult to achieve.

Teachers, principals, senior administrators, and trustees need training in how to work with parents and their influence; not by shutting parents out, nor by letting them take over; but by recognizing at least that they are partners who may have a valuable contribution to make before decisions are made. This is the approach adopted by The Canadian Home and School and P-T Federation (1985) and is the "co-operative" rather than "telling" model referred to by Laplante (1980). This study revealed great variety in practice in interacting with parents. There were suggestions some principals felt threatened by parental participation and the president of the district's teachers' association said training would be needed if parents were to be involved in school governance. Senior administrators have little experience in their jobs of working with parents, and trustees report their role with parents is mainly problem solving, with only a few regularly interacting extensively with this major constituency. Yet working with parents in a productive and mutually satisfying relationship occurs in many schools in the district.

Numerous sources in the literature support the need for training in working together for all three groups of actors in the tripartite relationship. The National Governors' Association in the U.S.A. (Lamm,1986:212) intends that school districts will be encouraged and assisted in developing more effective parent involvement techniques, including how to involve parents in advisory and school site management. In England a pilot course in training parent governors was conducted through the Open University, beginning in 1981 (Edmonds,1987). Hennessy (1985:87) claims that political decentralization will only be possible when trustees, school officials and teachers have learned how to communicate in ways that "elicit a concerned response rather than acquiescence." For success, all involved, not just principals, need to learn the techniques of working with parents. The literature indicates that change in schools is unlikely without adopting a whole system approach.

However, training the principal is still important. Both Louden (1980) and Alexandruk (1985) found that principals need help in working in a collegial relationship with teachers. The need is greater when parents are involved. As Peterson has made clear ~~(1985),~~ principals now have to teach themselves, through experiential learning, how to work with parents. This leaves too much room for error. If his figures for the U.S., where 70 percent of principals will be replaced by 1990, are approached in Canada, then there is a great opportunity to provide pre-service preparation in working with parents for most of the principals of the 1990s. Accentuated emphasis on the capacity to work with parents as a criterion in principal selection is also called for.

Essentially, this section has argued that as parents are a significant influence on schools, a better understanding of their role is needed, and this should lead to more formal provision for that role. As Hennessey (1985) noted, the parent citizen might be further along the way to gaining control of public education than has been recognized, and this casts a different light on participation. Control should be acceptable terminology in the practice of educational administration and associated with a thrust for local accountability. The school system should adapt to working with parental influence at all levels and exercise its control through educating parents, community and staff to create a climate of expectations for schools. Capitalizing on the potential of parental influence and harnessing it to productive purposes, will require, for success, extensive training for all parties. Carefully planned local accountability may prove to be the key to better schools.

Research

There is a need to fill the most obvious gap in this study by researching parent attitudes and how they are formed. How to get more parents to exercise the influence those who administer and work in the schools are willing to attribute to them, is a problem yet to be comprehensively tackled. Grainger found (1984), and several respondents in this study mentioned, that some parents fear representative arrangements for parental influence ~~because of~~ possible domination by an unrepresentative clique. The "open door," the professional's traditional argument for not having formal arrangements for parental influence, was also mentioned by some respondents. While open doors are valuable for handling individual problems, they do not allow general parent opinion to play a part in decision making. Representative organizations can do so but need guidance in winning the confidence of their constituency. Research on schools where representative arrangements work well, and on pilot projects, may allay parent fears and demonstrate formal representation can work effectively in their interests. Especially important might be research which can establish clearer links between parent participation and student benefits. This is not meant to imply there should be any diminution in the move towards greater informal parent involvement.

Research is needed on how each of the parties can best contribute to making the tripartite partnership work in the interests of students. The principal's importance cannot be overstressed and enough is still not known about how the balance of influences that has been at the centre of this research is achieved, nor about the optimum balance. Effective principalling involves more than simply achieving a balance amongst what exists, as at times principals must create parental influence if a school community identity is to be created. Some comparison of male and female principals might be justified in view of the claim that female principals have better parent relationships (Shakeshaft,1987:3). There are still large gaps in knowledge about what superordinates do and what they should be doing if a partnership concept is to emerge fully for all schools. Their acceptance of a basically educative leadership function will depend upon production of evidence of links to school improvement. They should become salespersons for what should be rather than what is. Ways in which superintendents and their staff can work directly with parents, rather than assigning that function almost exclusively to trustees and principals, need to be explored. The trustee's role needs further research, particularly on how trustees can truly function as the apex of a pyramid of parent participation and community interest, rather than the legitimators of senior administration.

This study confirms there are good reasons for some concentration of school administration research efforts on the tripartite relationship, which, together with teachers, covers the major actors. The analytic frameworks developed in this study will provide useful aids in formulating conceptual frameworks for such research. There are dangers of oversimplification and care will be needed, especially as each of these groups of actors is partly a product of its own environmental influences. It should be remembered, for example, that the district is only the agent of the all-powerful province. However, with regard to parental influence, there are grounds for arguing that the province might move farther and more quickly towards local school accountability if school districts were more amenable.

Replicative studies are needed in a variety of types of school district if the results are to be confidently generalized. Research needs to be done with different levels of schooling as it seems clear that parent relationship can differ markedly across levels of schooling. Similar studies could be conducted for junior and senior high schools with the objective of determining whether parental influence is less significant, and, if so, the reasons for the difference. Studies should be done with non-Catholic public districts in the province to determine whether there is any significant difference in the role of parents. The extent to which parental influence penetrates the school is another line of inquiry that should be pursued. Although the extent to which parents influence the core technology of teaching was not fully investigated in this study, there were some indications in the data. Parents in the school and classrooms directly affect teachers' work, while parental influence on the principal and the district indirectly affects teacher behavior and attitudes.

Control is a useful concept for approaching the tripartite relationship. At present it has few exponents in the literature of educational administration, perhaps because many have accepted loose coupling notions. No adequate theory has been developed which can encompass the multivariate phenomena involved but it does seem that research directed towards what determines principal behavior could be fruitful. The term "control" has been out of fashion but its reintroduction might inject more reality into research which would, in turn, prove more useful to practitioners.

Methodology

The methodology for this study borrowed freely from a variety of approaches that promised to be useful and ignored a few orthodoxies. In some ways this attitude resembles that of the effective manager, willing to use any conceptualization that will help to impose some order on the jumble of phenomena being faced, and being consistent only when consistency serves the overriding purpose. It may be that matching method to matter in this way will prove most rewarding for attaining a better understanding of administration. What it does not produce is a neatly packaged thesis, nor a tightly constructed argument from beginning to end.

The analytic frameworks developed as an integral part of the process of the study and the data analysis are a significant result and will be useful in further research. In effect, the data was used to modify ideas garnered from the literature and preliminary inquiries in order to develop the frameworks described in Chapter 5. This method of proceeding by adapting the insights of previous research as conceptualizations grow out of the data seems to be a useful compromise.

The triangulation of survey data, semi-structured interviews and document analysis was an effective means of conducting what was, in effect, a case study. The survey gave breadth, the interviews gave depth, and the documents gave a useful basis for comparison of the perceived reality with the formally stated. The triangulation could have been better in two ways. Analysis of the questionnaire data prior to the interviews would have allowed for better probing of why respondents answered the way they did, thus allowing for more confident conclusions. However, preliminary interviewing was a basis for construction of the questionnaire. Second, data sources could have been explored more thoroughly.

More qualitative methodology could have been employed in this study. For example, there could have been follow-up interviews to further explore and validate with respondents the insights developed from the questionnaire responses and the initial interviews. There could have been consultation with other potential respondents on the validity of the conclusions. Observation studies could have been useful with the researcher attending, for example, advisory committee meetings, or observing the impact of parents in the school and classrooms or during interaction with principals.

The deficiency in exploration of data sources was partly due to limitations imposed by the researcher's time and abilities. To do a more thorough case study of the tripartite relationship would require, preferably, a research team.

The deficiency was also caused by the attitude of the system involved. The system gave approval and the cooperation received could only be described as excellent. In direct personal contact, individual officers could not have been more helpful. However, the impression at times seemed to be that it was a case of just another researcher working on a school system convenient for him. There was no commitment, which might have opened a few more revealing doors and files, by the system to the research itself. That is, other than a general acknowledgement of the value of research, the school system had no particular interest in having the problem researched thoroughly. The case study does require subject commitment and any future researcher would be well-advised to spend more preparation time in identifying and ensuring this commitment. The problem was most acutely experienced with regard to the senior administrators as the population for this group was so small.

Comments on the value of the questionnaire and interview schedule were made in Chapter 5, and indications given of how they might be improved for future use. The questionnaire represents a good example of how insights derived from more qualitative methodology can, as they gain greater currency, be incorporated in survey methodology in order to assess how valid the perception is for a much larger number of subjects. Conclusions drawn in this study about the environmental control mechanism carry more weight because so many agreed with this view, and thus confirmed Peterson's original insight. More time could have been spent with some interviewees, particularly senior administrators, but there are no indications this would have altered the results.

The value of an intensive case study using multiple methodologies is illustrated by comparison of this study with studies which rely basically on the questionnaire for their results. For example, such studies have identified a shift in decision-making power from province and district to the principalship. But as the questionnaires only dealt with these formal decision-making levels, the researchers could only speculate on the consequences of this shift in power. Their studies did not reveal that at the same time as the principalship was getting more power, it was sharing that power increasingly with parents because of increasing local accountability.

The question has been asked about case studies: A case of what? This query raises generalizability issues already dealt with. Whether the extent of parental influence revealed in this study, and its control of principal behavior, are typical of other school systems must await further investigation, although the sameness amongst school systems, and the similarities with some findings in the U.S. in particular, would suggest at least the possibility of broader application.

SUMMARY

This chapter briefly summarized the study by indicating how a research problem was formulated, a study designed and conducted, and the data analyzed. The propositions derived from the data were listed, along with the implications of the study's results for the conceptual bases. These were the foundations for conclusions which essentially confirmed that parental influence is more significant for schools than generally recognized and that it does serve as a control over principal behavior for the school system. Allied conclusions concerning principals, superordinates and parents were also drawn. The usefulness of the concepts derived as theoretical perspectives was examined in light of this research and its conclusions. The main implications of these conclusions are that: (a) School systems need to come more openly to terms with the reality of parental influence; (b) extensive education in working with parents is needed for all organizational participants; (c) further research is required on the realities of school administration and on how to make partnership ideas work; and (d) the mix of methodologies and conceptual lens employed in this study can give a better understanding than rigid adherence to one approach.

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

PARENTAL INFLUENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you very much for looking at this questionnaire. It constitutes an important part of the research I am conducting as part of my Ph. D. program in Educational Administration at the University of Alberta. My Supervisor is Dr W. H. Worth.

I do hope you will be able to assist me by completing all items. You can be assured of my deep appreciation. A summary of the findings will be available when the study is completed. If you wish to have a copy please write your name and address on a sheet of paper and enclose the sheet in the questionnaire return envelope or hand to me separately.

The study is concerned with the influence that a school's parents exert on what happens within the school, particularly as it bears upon the work behavior of the principal. There has been little conclusive research on the matter and so this study is exploratory, aiming to establish what actually happens, through what are, often, very subtle processes. The formal relationships between school and parents are generally known, but it is possible there are less formal relationships which may be important. This part of the study is largely concerned with whether perceptions of Trustees, Senior Administrators, Principals and Teachers (the major organizational participants, apart from students) will yield insights into whether parents do have influence on schools, and, if so, how this occurs.

Please answer each question freely and openly. Some space has been provided for additional comments, but if it is insufficient please annotate or add additional pages as needed, in order to ensure you express your views to your own satisfaction.

Anonymity of responses is guaranteed. In no way will released data be attributable to its source, other than in aggregate relating to a school system or to categories such as trustees, senior administrators, etc. The identity of the system will not be disclosed. Individuals, schools and areas will not be identifiable. You will notice that the questionnaires have been coded. This code is known only to the researcher and will not be revealed to anyone else. The code is necessary in order to allot responses to categories for comparative purposes; to allow examination for any pattern in non-response which might introduce bias into the study; and to assist in effective sampling for some of the follow-up interviews.

Thank you for your assistance,

Harry Payne

Phone: 432 4909 (University)
437 5318 (home)

PLEASE TURN TO PART I, PAGE I.

PARENTAL INFLUENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

Code : ____
(1 - 4)

PART I ALL RESPONDENTS

The following questions explore some ways in which a school's parent community may influence activities within the school, particularly with regard to principal behavior. In most instances they are concerned with "informal" influence and seek an answer regarding practice - what, in fact, happens (written policies, if they exist, generally give little detail). Please answer the questions from your own perspective in your school system and on the basis of your own experience with its elementary schools.

For the purposes of the questionnaire, **parents** are the parents of the children attending the school, and individuals or groups claiming to represent them. The study is concerned **only with elementary schools** in your school system, and so you should decide on your answers in relation to regular elementary schools.

Please indicate **your view** on the following questions by selecting, from the scale below, the number that best applies in each case. For example, if you consider the matter is regarded as important you would place a 'two' on the line beside it, i.e., __2__.

1	2	3	4
Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant

1. How important, generally, are differences between what schools do and what parents think they should be doing? ____ (5)

2. With what importance, generally, does a school staff regard parental expectations? ____ (6)

3. How important are School Parent Advisory Committees in influencing decision-making by the principal? ____ (7)

4. In your school district, how important is it that principals gain, and maintain, parental support? ____ (8)

5. How important is it for principals to have autonomy, that is, discretion to do their job as they see fit? ____ (9)

6. What importance does your school district's administration place on the school's being responsive to its parents? ____ (10)

7. How important is the school's parent community as a constraining influence on principals' discretionary decision-making or freedom of action in their work? ____ (11)

PLEASE TURN TO PART I, PAGE 2.

PART I, PAGE 2.
Code : ____
(1 - 4)

1	2	3	4
Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant

8. How important is it that a principal accept the wishes of parents generally, even though he or she might disagree? ____ (12)

9. What importance do parents attach to the school's meeting their expectations? ____ (13)

10. What importance should the school district give to parents' expectations of the school their children attend? ____ (14)

11. How important are parental expectations as a means through which your school district administration influences principals? ____ (15)

12. How important is it that your school district administration convinces parents of the value of its objectives and policies so that they will, in turn, have these expectations of schools? ____ (16)

13. How important is parental reaction in a principal's assessment of the success of a curriculum program, e.g., a computer course? ____ (17)

14. How important is parental reaction in a principal's assessment of the success of an administrative practice, e.g., school dismissal times? ____ (18)

15. How important is parental opinion in a principal's decision on whether to introduce something new in the curriculum, e.g., options? ____ (19)

16. How important is parental opinion in a principal's decision to change an administrative practice, e.g., the period for reporting to parents on student progress? ____ (20)

17. What importance is attached to information from the school's parent community in a superintendent's assessment of a principal's performance? ____ (21)

18. How important is evidence of parental support in evaluation of schools by the school district's senior administrators? ____ (22)

19. What importance is given by principals to demonstrating that their schools have the support of their parent community? ____ (23)

PLEASE TURN TO PART I, PAGE 3.

Code: ______
(1 - 4)

1	2	3	4
Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant

20. For a principal seeking a favourable transfer, how important is evidence of ability to gain parental support for a school? ______ (24)

21. How important in improving a principal's promotion chances is demonstrated ability to gain parental support for a school? ______ (25)

22. What importance do principals attach to parental complaints about occurrences in the school? ______ (26)

23. What importance do principals place on resolving, at the school level, problems arising with parents, rather than involving higher levels in the school district? ______ (27)

24. To what extent do principals regard it as important that their superiors be informed of most problems arising at the school with parents? ______ (28)

25. What importance do principals place on promoting parental support for School District policies? ______ (29)

26. What importance do principals place on promoting parental support for Alberta Education policies? ______ (30)

27. What importance is attached to the parent community's expectations in selecting staff for a school? ______ (31)

28. How important is it that a teacher be responsive to the school's parent community? ______ (32)

29. Of what importance is information from parents in the informal evaluation of teachers? ______ (33)

30. How important is parental dissatisfaction as a reason for transfer of teachers? ______ (34)

PLEASE TURN TO PART II, PAGE 4.

Code: ______
(1 - 4)

PARENTAL INFLUENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

PART II TRUSTEES

The following questions are designed to obtain some information about you and your background, as well as some of your perceptions about how your School District operates. Please answer the questions with a check mark (√) in the appropriate space.

1. How many years, including the current year, have you served as a school board Trustee?	1. ____ 1-2 yrs	2. ____ 3-4 yrs	3. ____ 5-6 yrs	4. ____ 7-8 yrs	5. ____ 9+ yrs	(35)
2. How many years, including the current year, have you been a Trustee for this district?	1. ____ 1-2 yrs	2. ____ 3-4 yrs	3. ____ 5-6 yrs	4. ____ 7-8 yrs	5. ____ 9+ yrs	(36)
3. Should trustees support a decision they feel is correct, even though a majority of the community is opposed?	1. ____ Usually	2. ____ Frequently	3. ____ Occasionally	4. ____ Seldom	5. ____ Rarely	(37)
4. Are principals free, within policy, to administer schools as they see fit?	1. ____ Usually	2. ____ Frequently	3. ____ Occasionally	4. ____ Seldom	5. ____ Rarely	(38)
5. As a Trustee, how often do you receive information about individual schools and principals from parents?	1. ____ Usually	2. ____ Frequently	3. ____ Occasionally	4. ____ Seldom	5. ____ Rarely	(39)

PLEASE TURN TO PART III, PAGE 5.

Code : 368
(1 - 4)

PARENTAL INFLUENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

PART II DISTRICT SENIOR ADMINISTRATION

The following questions are designed to obtain information about you and your background, as well as some of your perceptions about how the School District operates. Please answer the questions with a check mark (√) in the appropriate space, or as otherwise indicated.

1. How many years, including the current year, have you been a senior administrator, i.e., senior to principals	1. ____ 1-5 yrs	2. ____ 6-10 yrs	3. ____ 11-15 yrs	4. ____ 16-20 yrs	5. ____ 21+yrs	(35)
2. How many years, including the current year, have you been in your present position?	1. ____ 1-2 yrs	2. ____ 3-4 yrs	3. ____ 5-6 yrs	4. ____ 7-8 yrs	5. ____ 9+ yrs	(36)
3. Are principals free, within policy, to administer their schools as they see fit?	1. ____ Usually	2. ____ Frequently	3. ____ Occasionally	4. ____ Seldom	5. ____ Rarely	(37)
4. Do you consider that your school district has sufficient control over principals?	1. ____ Usually	2. ____ Frequently	3. ____ Occasionally	4. ____ Seldom	5. ____ Rarely	(38)
5. Would you maintain a decision you thought was correct, even though you knew a majority of the parents concerned was opposed?	1. ____ Usually	2. ____ Frequently	3. ____ Occasionally	4. ____ Seldom	5. ____ Rarely	(39)
6. In your job, how often do you receive information from parents about individual schools or principals?	1. ____ Usually	2. ____ Frequently	3. ____ Occasionally	4. ____ Seldom	5. ____ Rarely	(40)
7. Do parents in higher socio-economic areas have more influence on their school than parents in lower areas?	1. ____ Usually	2. ____ Frequently	3. ____ Occasionally	4. ____ Seldom	5. ____ Rarely	(41)
8. Do you have any organizations or groups representing parents to advise you in your job? If 'yes', please give names.	1. ____ Yes	2. ____ No				(42)

____

PLEASE TURN TO PART III, PAGE 5.

PARENTAL INFLUENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

PART II TEACHERS Code : ____ (1 - 4)

The following questions are designed to obtain information about you and your background, as well as some of your perceptions about how the School District operates. Please answer the questions with a check mark (√) in the appropriate space.

1. How many years, including the current year, have you been a teacher?
   1. ____ 1-5 yrs 2. ____ 6-10 yrs 3. ____ 11-15 yrs 4. ____ 16-20 yrs 5. ____ 21+ yrs (35)

2. How many years, including the current year, have you been a teacher in the school district in which you now work?
   1. ____ 1-5 yrs 2. ____ 6-10 yrs 3. ____ 11-15 yrs 4. ____ 16-20 yrs 5. ____ 21+ yrs (36)

3. How would you rate your school parent community in socio-economic terms?
   1. ____ Very high 2. ____ High 3. ____ Average 4. ____ Low 5. ____ Very low (37)

4. Are principals free, within policy, to administer their schools as they see fit?
   1. ____ Usually 2. ____ Frequently 3. ____ Occasionally 4. ____ Seldom 5. ____ Rarely (38)

5. How often do you receive information about your work from parents?
   1. ____ Usually 2. ____ Frequently 3. ____ Occasionally 4. ____ Seldom 5. ____ Rarely (39)

6. Do you attend meetings of parent groups associated with your school?
   1. ____ Usually 2. ____ Frequently 3. ____ Occasionally 4. ____ Seldom 5. ____ Rarely (40)

7. How would you rate the influence of formal parent groups on decision-making in your school?
   1. ____ Very high 2. ____ High 3. ____ Average 4. ____ Low 5. ____ Very low (41)

PLEASE TURN TO PART III, PAGE 5.

PARENTAL INFLUENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

PART II PRINCIPALS

Code: ______
(1 - 4)

The following questions are designed to obtain information about you and your background, as well as some of your perceptions about how the School District operates. Please answer the questions with a check mark (√) in the appropriate space, or as otherwise indicated.

1. How many years, including the current year, have you been a principal?	1. ____ 1-5 yrs	2. ____ 6-10 yrs	3. ____ 11-15 yrs	4. ____ 16-20 yrs	5. ____ 21+ yrs	(35)
2. How many years, including the current year, have you been principal of your present school?	1. ____ 1-2 yrs	2. ____ 3-4 yrs	3. ____ 5-6 yrs	4. ____ 7-8 yrs	5. ____ 9+ yrs	(36)
3. How would you rate your school community in socio-economic terms?	1. ____ Very high	2. ____ High	3. ____ Average	4. ____ Low	5. ____ Very low	(37)
4. Do you feel that the school district administration allows you sufficient discretion to do your job as you see fit?	1. ____ Usually	2. ____ Frequently	3. ____ Occasionally	4. ____ Seldom	5. ____ Rarely	(38)
5. In your job, how often do you receive information about your school from parents?	1. ____ Usually	2. ____ Frequently	3. ____ Occasionally	4. ____ Seldom	5. ____ Rarely	(39)
6. a) Does your school have any formal groups, representing parents, to advise you?	1. ____ Yes	2. ____ No				(40)
b) If "yes", please write name(s).	______________________________ ______________________________					
c) How would you rate the parent group's influence on your decision-making?	1. ____ Very high	2. ____ High	3. ____ Average	4. ____ Low	5. ____ Very low	(41)
7. Are there differences between what you think you should be doing as a principal and what your school's parents think you should be doing?	1. ____ Usually	2. ____ Frequently	3. ____ Occasionally	4. ____ Seldom	5. ____ Rarely	(42)

Please give examples: ____

____

______________________ PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 4a.

PART II PRINCIPALS
Code : ______
(1 - 4)

8. Below are listed six areas of school activity in which a principal may have decisions to make and policies to develop. Imagine that some **parents** of children at your school have indicated both in public and by private correspondence that they see a need for change in what your school is doing in each of these areas. Each proposal is **not** "outrageous", but its adoption would mean some change in the current practices of your school.

INSTRUCTIONS

In the appropriate space after each of the areas of school activity listed below, check (√) the rating (1 or 2 or 3 or 4 or 5) from the following scale which best conveys the strength of your feeling of compulsion to accept the proposal.

Rating	Description
1.	I would feel I had **no choice** but to initiate the change.
2.	I would feel **strongly compelled** to consider the change but I just might not make it.
3.	I would feel **moderately strongly compelled** to consider the change and more often than not I would make it.
4.	I would feel **not even moderately strongly compelled** to consider the change and most often I would not make it.
5.	I would feel **no compulsion** at all to consider the change and would ignore the proposal.

AREAS OF SCHOOL ACTIVITY	STRENGTH OF FEELING					
a. Community involvement in the formulation of school objectives.	1.____	2.____	3.____	4.____	5.____	(43)
b. Instructional methods used in the classroom.	1.____	2.____	3.____	4.____	5.____	(44)
c. Standards for student conduct.	1.____	2.____	3.____	4.____	5.____	(45)
d. Assignment of teachers to grades or classes.	1.____	2.____	3.____	4.____	5.____	(46)
e. Recommendations for changes to school buildings.	1.____	2.____	3.____	4.____	5.____	(47)
f. Expenditure of school funds.	1.____	2.____	3.____	4.____	5.____	(48)

PLEASE TURN TO PART III, PAGE 5.

5.

PARENTAL INFLUENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

PART III ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Code : _______
(1 - 4)

This study is trying to determine whether a school's parents influence what happens in the school and, if so, how the influence operates. Answering the questions may have led you to thoughts about other important and related matters which have not been mentioned. Any comment you care to make about how parents influence the work of schools and the work behavior of their principals would be very much appreciated. Thank you for your efforts.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

GENERAL - ALL INTERVIEWEES

Introduction

Begin with some general discussion stimulated by some general comments on the school system or school or teaching in order to free up the situation and lay a basis for rapport. Probably will include some of the interviewer's own background and perhaps some comments on general differences in schooling as compared to Australia. At the opportune moment, lead in to the business of the interview with something like the following.

"This is a semi-structured interview. That means I'll ask you to respond to some general questions about the matters raised in the questionnaire and perhaps extending it a little further. You're free to respond as you see fit and to introduce any observations that appear to you to be relevant. Anything that will throw some light on the subject will be most welcome. At times I'll follow-up on your replies in order to get a point clearly, to probe a little as to what lies behind your thinking, to call your attention to something that might be related, and so on.

"I'll have to take notes as we're not recording the interview. Don't let this put you off at all. If you like, you can ask me what I have taken down or make sure I get any particular point. Talk freely - I'll ask you if I think I've missed something.

"Sometime today, hopefully, I'll write my notes up in a reasonable form and then have them typed. I'll let you have a copy. If you feel they need to be amended, you can make changes to the copy and let me have it back.

"Is that OK? Any questions before we start?"

Question G 1

Do you have any general comments to make after completing the questionnaire?

Supplementary Any point you'd like to pursue further?
What do you think, generally, about this topic?
Any difficulties in completing it?

Question G 2

For which questions did you choose one of the extremes on the scale? Do you want to comment further on those?

Supplementary Do you feel strongly about that?
Have you any examples in mind?

Question G 3

In your experience, has there been an increase in the influence parents are having on their children's schools? Are they more influential now than they used to be?

Supplementary How do you account for this?
What are the possible reasons?
What are the implications for the school principal?
Has it changed things in schools?

Question G 4

What are your views on having formal means for parent influence on their children's schools? Like school parent advisory committees?

Supplementary Should parents be appointed or elected to these?
Should the same idea be applied to the trustee - should they hold regular forums for parents and perhaps before elections?
Do, or could, these committees have any real influence?
Can you have a good school without parent support?

Question G 5

What is your understanding of official policy on parent influence on their school? First of all, what does Alberta Education say? What about the District's policy?

Supplementary How well are these policies implemented?
Do you know of any written material which might give information on these policies?

Question G 6

Some people have indicated they feel parents are influential in only some areas of the school's operations. Do you agree with that?

Supplementary In which areas are they most influential?
In which areas are they least influential?
In which areas should they be influential?

Question G 7

Are some parents more influential than others?

Supplementary Who are the influential ones?
Why do they have influence?
How many are involved?
Is parental opinion unified or is it divided? Can we talk of parent influence or should we specify which group of parents?

Question G 8

Does the extent of parent influence differ according to the kind of elementary school? For example, special identity schools like community and French Immersion schools.

Supplementary Is there anything that particularly characterizes these schools?
Are there any parts of the city where parent influence on the school is stronger than in other parts? Can you account for this?
Can you name any regular elementary schools in the system where it seems to you parental influence on the school is very strong? Or weak?
Are there schools that seem to work particularly well with parents and others that seem to be really at odds with them? Would you care to name them?

Question G 9

Some people think there might be two ways in which parents influence their school. First, the community generally has ideas about what should happen in schools and provided the schools keep within these boundaries, they can do much as they like. Second, on particular issues only, do parents get concerned. Is this a reasonable way of describing the situation?

Supplementary Can you think of illustrations of these?
What might be inside or outside the "zone of tolerance"?
On what issues do parents want to be consulted?

Question G 10

Does the school system encourage principals to be responsive/responsible/accountable to parents? If so, why?

Supplementary How does the system encourage responsiveness?
Does this act as a control over principal behavior?
Is this done deliberately to control principals?
Besides instructing principals, what other ways does the school system have for getting them to do what it wants?

Question G 11

The principal has sometimes been described as the man (or woman) in the middle? Do you want to comment on that description?

Supplementary With regard to parents? the community? the administration? the Board? teachers? students?

TRUSTEES

Question T 1

Do you feel your school system has any special features regarding parental influence that might make it different to other school systems?

Supplementary Is there a particular philosophy?
Do parents have more or less influence over principals in your system than in others?
What are the features that distinguish your system?
How do you account for the differences?
Do you think the schools are responsive enough to parents?

Question T 2

What sort of contact do you have with parents? Are they frequent? Where do they occur? What are they generally about?

Supplementary How do you get information on what parents think?
How do you assess parental opinion? And decide whether the opinion is general?
How do you respond to a parent approach and what do you do by way of follow-up?
Do you approach principals directly over parental concerns?
How do you handle a complaint from a parent about a particular school?

Question T 3

Does the fact that parents can contact you have any effect on a principal's behavior?

Supplementary Do principals try to head-off parents from bringing complaints to you? Or to the Superintendent?
Any examples?

Question T 4

Do you have any involvement in principal selection? Formal or informal?

Supplementary Are there any internal politics involved in principal selection?
Does parental opinion influence principal selection? How?
Do you pass on to the Superintendent your opinion of principals?

Question T 5

Do you identify the principal with the school? Is the principal fully responsible for all aspects of the school and fully accountable?

Supplementary How much discretion does the principal have?
Should he or she have more or less?
Do parents hold the principal fully accountable for what goes

on in the school?

Question T 6

Can you think of any cases where a principal lost the support of the school's parents? What happened?

Supplementary How was the matter handled?
Why did he or she lose their support?
Is this important in demotion or involuntary transfer?

Question T 7

Have you been concerned with any cases of serious teacher misbehavior? What was the nature of the concern about the teacher's behavior?

Supplementary What was your interest in the case?
How did you come to know about it?

Question T 8

What is your own orientation as a trustee? Should you make decisions according to what parents want or according to the way you see things?

Supplementary Do you feel trustees adequately represent parent views?
Is it your job to see that parents' values are reflected in the schools?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATORS

Question A 1

Do you get much information on what parents think about their school or principal? How?

Supplementary Formal and informal?
Are contacts with parents frequent?
Where do they occur?
What, generally, do they want to talk to you about?
Do you have any regular contacts that supply information on what parents are thinking?
Do you have any contacts with whom you test (or sound-out) your thinking about the schools?

Question A 2

Do you think your accessibility to parents has any influence on principals? Are they sensitive to the fact that you listen to parents?

Supplementary Do principals try to forestall parents coming to you?
Do the views of parents play any part in your assessment of principals and schools?
Do they affect a principal's career prospects?
Do principals try to keep parents from bringing problems to you?

Question A 3

How do you handle parental complaints about principals, or schools?

Supplementary Is there a standard procedure or a policy?
What happens when a principal appears to have lost the support of parents?
Are there any examples of principals being penalized because of this?

How do you decide when the situation is serious enough for you to act?

Question A 4

Do the Trustees provide you with information from parents about principals and schools?

Supplementary What sort of information?
How is the information conveyed?
What do you do about it?
Do Trustees see this as their role?
Do Trustees deal directly with principals on complaints they receive from parents?
Do you approve of this role for Trustees?

Question A 5

What are the main teacher misbehavior problems that you encounter?

Supplementary How do you generally find out about teacher misbehavior?
Is the effect their behavior might have on parents important?
What kinds of teacher behavior concern you most?

Question A 6

Do you expect principals to keep you informed of problems they might encounter with parents?

Suppementary Any kinds of problems in particular?
When should principals involve you?
Do you have any examples of when they should or shouldn't have informed you?
How would you describe a good principal from this perspective?

Question A 7

Does the ability to win parent support play any part in principal or teacher selection?

Supplementary Do you have any criteria?
How do you assess this ability?
What are your ideas on the ideal principal?

Question A 8

How far do you identify the principal with the school? Is he or she fully responsible for all aspects?

Supplementary Do principals have much discretion?
Should they be accountable for everything concerning the school?
Can you have a good school without a good principal?

Question A 9

How much influence do you have over principals?

Supplementary Do they do what they're told?
What methods do you use to get them to follow your policies?
Are there informal means or indirect methods?
Can you give me examples of where principals did not follow you instructions?
What did you do about it?

PRINCIPALS

Question P 1

Do parents influence your work behavior? How?

Supplementary Any areas in particular?
How do you rate your school, in comparison with others, in this regard?
Have things changed over the years in this respect?
How do you assess parent views?
Where do you get your information on what parents are thinking? Formal or informal?
Do you have any regular contacts?
Do you ever approach parents to sound them out?

Question P 2

Do you have any direct contact with Trustees?

Supplementary What sort of contact? What's it about generally?
How do you handle an approach by a Trustee about something connected with your school??
How seriously do you regard a Trustee's bringing a matter to your attention?
How do you react when a parent says she or he is going to take a problem with your school to a Trustee?

Question P 3

How do you find working with an Advisory Committee according to Board policy? Do you have any problems?

Supplementary Is the Advisory Committee representative of parents?
Does it accept your professional leadership?
Any examples of matters on which you and the committee disagreed? How do you handle such cases?

Question P 4

Do you accept full responsibility for everything that happens in the school?

Supplementary Is the principal, in effect, the school?
Do parents look at it this way?
When might a principal be excused for something unacceptable that happens in the school?
Do you have sufficient authority and discretion to do your job?

Question P 5

When do you refer a problem with parents to you superior?

Supplementary How often does this happen?
Do you try to keep him informed of all such problems?
Under what circumstances should you inform him?
Does the possibility that a parent might take a complaint to the Superintendent affect your response to a complaint?
Do you try and head them off? Why?

Question P 6

Do you see yourself as buffering both teachers and your superordinates from parents?

Supplementary Do you try to stop parents interfering with what goes on in the classroom?

Does central office need to be protected from having too many parent matters to deal with?
Do you see yourself as the key figure in handling parents?

Question P 7

Do you think your superordinates get much information about you work from parents and that this plays a part in their assessment of you and your school?

Supplementary How do they get this information?
Just how important is it for a principal's standing?
Have you got any examples in mind - concerning yourself or other principals?
Are there any well known cases in the school system?

Question P 8

Can you describe any serious teacher misbehavior cases you have encountered as a principal?

Supplementary How did you learn of the problem?
Why was it a matter of concern?
How did you handle it?
Was the possible effect on parent opinion of importance?

Question P 9

Do you feel bound to give unqualified support to all Board and Alberta Education policies?

Supplementary Are there any examples of when you didn't?
How much discretion do you have?
Does your estimate of parental thinking affect your response?

TEACHERS

Question S 1

How do parents affect your work as a teacher?

Supplementary Are there things you do, or don't do, because of what you anticipate parental reaction might be?
Do you do anything specifically to encourage parent support for your work?
Is your school fairly standard in this respect?
Are there efforts in the school to make staff sensitive to what parents might think?

Question S 2

What do you, as a teacher, expect of your principal with regard to parents?

Supplementary How should the principal deal with parent interventions and complaints in regard to teachers?
Do you expect the principal to protect your autonomy in the classroom?
Have you had any problems with parents? How were they dealt with?
Does the fact that parents can approach your principal, in any way affect your attitude towards them?

Question S 3

Is your principal fully responsible for everything that happens in the school?

Supplementary Should he or she be?
In what areas should the principal be held accountable?
Do parents hold the principal responsible?

Question S 4

How autonomous do you think your principal is? How much discretion does he or she have?

Supplementary What sort of constraints are there on a principal's work behavior?
Can you give me examples or illustrations both of constraints and of freedoms?

Question S 5

What are the main components of your principal's work? What are the main things he or she does?

Supplementary What should be the most important things for a principal to do?
What ranking would you give to "handling parents" as a priority?

Question S 6

What are the most serious forms of teacher misbehavior in your view?

Supplementary Do you know of any examples?
What sort of things should a teacher avoid doing or not doing in order to stay out of trouble with parents?

Question S 7

What are the most important things that will help a teacher who wants promotion?

Supplementary What role, if any, do parents play in determining a teacher's career prospects?

APPENDIX C

CORRESPONDENCE

14th September, 1986.

Dr. ——————
Area Superintendent, ——————
——————— Catholic Schools.

Dear Dr. ————,

You probably know that I have been given approval to conduct a study of parental influence in elementary schools in the ------------- Catholic School District. In addition to furthering my Ph. D. program, the study will, I hope, also provide some useful information for your school system.

The study design calls for an in-depth look at just one school system - ---------- Separate. Naturally, individual participation is voluntary. However, you will understand that as the total number of senior administrators is small, I am particularly anxious to have the opportunity to work with them all. I do hope that you will be able to participate. Your help will certainly be very much appreciated.

As, no doubt, you have an onerous schedule, I am trying to allow maximum lead time and flexibility. I have enclosed a short questionnaire which may take up to thirty minutes to complete. If you can find the time to look at it, you will gain some further insight into the study. I propose that I telephone you in about a week to discuss whether you can help and, if so, to agree on a time in the next month or two when I could pick up the completed questionnaire and interview you, for perhaps an hour, in order to explore further some of the issues raised and your experiences and observations as a senior administrator. I have enclosed a reply paid and addressed envelope which can be used to maintain the confidentiality of the completed document and to post it to me if there is some hitch in these arrangements.

It may be of interest to you (and help with the language) if I point out that I am an Australian with extensive experience as a teacher, principal and administrator. At present I am on leave from my position as Director of Personnel in the Education Department of the Northern Territory of Australia.

I do hope you will be able to find the time to assist me in the study and I look forward to meeting you.

Yours sincerely,

C. H. Payne

25th September, 1986

Mr ———————
Principal
——————— Catholic Elementary School
——————— Rd.
———————.

Dear Mr ————,

I have been given approval to conduct a study of parental influence in elementary schools in the ———— Catholic School District. In addition to furthering my Ph. D. program, the study will, I hope, also provide some useful information for the schools.

Participation, as a respondent in the study, is, of course, voluntary. However, as the study design involves an in-depth examination of just one school system and only its elementary schools, it is important that as many of the schools as possible are involved. So I am very hopeful that you, personally, will be able to participate and that you will approve of my approaching three randomly selected teachers from your staff. Your cooperation and assistance will certainly be very much appreciated.

As, no doubt, you have an onerous schedule, I am trying to allow maximum lead time and flexibility. I have enclosed a short questionnaire which could take about thirty minutes to complete. If you can find the time to look at it, you will gain some further insight into the study. I propose that I telephone you in about a week to discuss whether you can help and, if so, to agree on a time when I may pick up your completed questionnaire, distribute almost identical questionnaires to the three members of staff, and discuss with you any aspect of the study that you may wish to pursue further. I have also enclosed a return envelope which may be used to maintain the confidentiality of the completed questionnaire and to post it to me if there is some hitch in these arrangements.

The second phase of the study includes either interviews with a small sample of principals and teachers or a closer examination of two schools which the early data indicate might provide further insights. It may happen that I will need to seek your assistance again.

It may be of interest to you (and help with the language) if I point out that I am an Australian with extensive experience as a teacher, principal and administrator. At present I am on leave from my position as Director of Personnel in the Education Department of the Northern Territory of Australia.

I do hope you will be able to find the time to assist me in the study and I look forward to meeting you.

Yours sincerely,

C. H. Payne

3rd October, 1986

Mrs ---------------
------------------ Catholic School
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Dear Mrs -----------,

I have been given approval to conduct a study of parental influence in elementary schools in the ----------------------- Catholic School District. In addition to furthering my Ph. D. program, the study will, I hope, also provide some useful information for teachers and their schools.

I am seeking your help as your name has been selected as one of three members of staff from your school who might be most able to contribute insights to the study. Consequently I am taking the liberty of forwarding the enclosed questionnaire. It could take, at most, about thirty minutes. Participation as a respondent is, of course, voluntary. However, as the study design involves an in-depth examination of just one school system and only some of its schools, I am anxious to have a good return rate and very much hope that you will be able to participate.

Could you please complete the questionnaire and return it, through the school office, in the enclosed envelope, which is addressed to the research liaison officer. She will pass it on to me. I am available for personal contact by each teacher to whom I have sent the questionnaire and would like to meet as many as possible in order to answer any queries, to improve the validity of the study, and to express my appreciation. Being a visiting Australian (from the Northern Territory), with a long career as a teacher, principal and senior administrator, I really do enjoy talking with local teachers, and, quite apart from the study, I am keen to hear as much as I can about education in the ------------- Catholic Schools. So please don't hesitate to let me know if you would like to meet with me and, perhaps, hear something about Australia in return.

The second phase of the study will involve interviews with a small proportion of respondents, randomly selected. In the event that your name appears again, I might have to seek your assistance once more.

I realise only too well that my request is an imposition on an already demanding work life, but I do hope you will be able to find the time to assist me with the study.

Yours sincerely

C. H. Payne

8th October, 1986.

Mr. -----------
Principal
-------------- Catholic School.

Dear Mr ---------,

As discussed on the telephone, I am forwarding three copies of the Teacher form of the Parental Influence Questionnaire. I would be very much obliged if you would distribute them to three members of you staff who might be interested in completing them. As I mentioned, I was unable to do a random sample as the school system considered an approach through principals was better. On reflection, I think this is wise and , in fact, could improve the study.

There is little likelihood that I need to inform you further on the study or to stress the importance of gaining a better understanding of the parents' role in relation to the school. It is something with which we are all going to have to deal in the years ahead. I have included a covering letter in each envelope for teachers and it gives them some further information on the study and myself.

To each envelope I have attached a yellow sticker which has a number written on it. If you could write the teacher's name on the appropriate sticker and return these to me in the reply envelope provided, I will be able to draw a small random sample to ask for an interview in order to validate the questionnaire and explore the subject a little further from the teacher's viewpoint.

In asking teachers to take the questionnaire you might have regard to the following. Preferably they should not be teachers in their first year of teaching. Hopefully they will be teachers who have views on the subject and so are likely to complete it. If we can avoid deputy principals, that would be preferable, but this is not mandatory.

Once again, I must state how grateful I am for the assistance I have received. I appreciate only too well that I am asking a lot of people whose energies are being fully tested in their work. This is one reason I have tried to choose a topic which has some relevance to us all, and I have tried to keep the time requested to a minimum.

Yours sincerely,

C. H. Payne

18th October, 1986.

Mrs ——————
Trustee
———— Catholic Schools
——————————
——————————.

Dear Mrs ————,

May I be so forward as to remind you that, according to my records at the date of posting, I have not received your completed "Parental Influence" questionnaire. While I have considerable misgivings about writing to you again, especially in view of the generous way in which you have already given me your time, I am obliged to send this reminder. Because there are only seven trustees, the quality of the study I am conducting will be seriously impaired if I do not make a maximum effort to get a questionnaire return from each. So much time and effort has already gone into the research that it would be a pity for it to be marred in this fashion.

You should have received from me a copy of my notes from the interview you were good enough to give me. In view of the poor record of the Post Office in delivering the questionnaires, I feel bound to mention this as a check on whether you did indeed receive them. Although I invited you to return the copy of the notes with any amendments you wished made, this is not essential if you are happy to let the record stand. Having you check the record of interview is really intended to be a check on me, to ensure I have represented you views reasonably accurately.

I hope to proceed soon with the statistical analysis of the questionnaire returns and this is why I'm writing now. If you haven't done so already, I would be very grateful if you could squeeze the time to complete at least Parts I and II of the questionnaire, and return it to me. This will ensure much better foundations for the conclusions drawn from the study and any recommendations that emerge. I have enclosed a reply paid and addressed envelope in case you have misplaced the original and for your use if you want to contact me other than by telephone.

Once again, I would express my appreciation of your assistance. It has been wonderful and I am sorry to have to bother you again.

Yours sincerely,

C. H. Payne

3rd November, 1986.

Mrs ---------------
Trustee
--------------- Catholic Schools

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Dear Mrs ---------,

You may be interested in an update on the progress of my study of parent influence on elementary schools in the ---------- Catholic School District. To date I have interviewed some forty six people, thirty eight being Edmonton Catholic Schools personnel ranging from Trustees to classroom teachers. Overall the questionnaire returns have been good as I have four from the seven Trustees, nine from the eleven senior administrators approached, forty from the forty two principals who agreed to participate, and seventy five from the one hundred and fifteen teachers to whom the questionnaires were sent no more than three weeks ago. I have also read a very considerable file of documents and background literature.

No doubt it will give you some satisfaction to know that after more than two months of intensive and extensive contact with personnel at all levels in ------------- Catholic Schools I can report that everywhere I have been met with unfailing courtesy, consideration and friendliness. The level of cooperation afforded me must rank very high in any comparison with other systems and those who were unable to help have been very few in number.

While overall the questionnaire return rate promises to be highly satisfactory, there is one potential weakness which could detract significantly from the value of the study. Three out of the seven Trustee questionnaires were not collected at interview because of a delivery failure in the initial posting. Since they constitute almost half the Trustees, they really are needed if the Trustee group is to be included in the final survey analysis and there is to be any confidence in the results.

In view of its importance, I would like to ask that you forward me your completed questionnaire. As you have had such a busy time since we talked, it is possible that you may have mislaid the questionnaire I gave you when we met. So I have enclosed another copy together with a return envelope. I do hope that you can find a few minutes to at least complete the questions and return your answers to me. In this way a very significant aspect of the study will proceed into the next stage - data analysis - which I anticipate will keep me fully occupied for the next month or two. Only the importance to the study justifies my intruding on your time once again.

Yours sincerely,

C. H. Payne.

27th October, 1986.

Mrs -------------------
--------- Catholic School.

Dear Mrs -------------,

As previously advised, I am conducting a study of the nature of parental influence on elementary schools in the ------------ Catholic School District and of the relationships amongst the school, parents and school system, or the principal, parents and superintendents. The study involves a questionnaire, interviews and analysis of any pertinent documents.

At this stage I have completed about thirty interviews, with about another ten to do. I have accumulated a considerable literature for analysis. About two thirds of the questionnaires have been returned and the responses have been entered in preparation for computer analysis. I would like to do the analysis in about two weeks.

According to my records at the time of writing, I have not received your completed questionnaire. If you have already returned it could you please simply return this letter in the enclosed envelope. **If you have not yet completed the questionnaire could I request that you do so as soon as possible?** It is important for the study that there be a maximum return rate of the questionnaire, particularly as I have restricted the investigation to an intensive look at a relatively small sample, rather then doing a broad survey in less depth.

In seeking your assistance I am very conscious of the imposition I am making on your time and that there are many other demands upon it. My justification is that the role of parents in relation to schools is a significant matter, it is clearly one whose importance is increasing, and there is a clear need for a better understanding of the existing situation on the part of policy makers, many in administrative positions, and those providing administrator and teacher preparation.

Yours sincerely,

C. H. Payne

27th October, 1986.

Mr. -----------------
Principal
------------- Catholic School.

Dear Mr --------------,

As promised, I am enclosing a copy of my draft notes from our discussion. They are a fairly rough effort as I have not endeavoured to change the conversational style or to make the English perfect. Rather, I have simply been interested in capturing the essence of the points you made, retaining the tone, and including a few quotations. I have been selective about the points recorded, and have written only those which I thought might possibly have some bearing on the study.

I previously indicated that this material is confidential. It will not be attributed to you personally in any way and the origins will remain confidential to you and me. Any of it that I might use in my writing will simply be shown as coming from a principal.

If you can find the time, I would appreciate your editing it as you see fit in order to ensure I have expressed your thoughts reasonably accurately. You might like to add any afterthoughts you may have had. Feel free to write whatever comments and amendments you would like on the document itself. Please return it to me in the enclosed envelope which is already addressed for delivery through internal mail to the liaison officer, who will pass it on to me.

I would like to reiterate my appreciation of your assistance. I could not really have expected more and it gives me real pleasure to recall your willingness to help and your welcoming attitude. I only hope my final product will justify the use of your time and that I might be able to reciprocate in some way.

Yours sincerely,

C. H. Payne

APPENDIX D

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

The documents, articles and books listed in Appendix D have not been included in the bibliography because they could assist in identification of the school district from which the data was gathered. As the application to the school district for approval to undertake the study included an undertaking not to reveal its identity, these sources have been listed separately as an appendix which will not be available to any reader other than the oral examination committee.

APPENDIX E
QUESTIONNAIRE PART I
TABLE OF MEANS

Table 45
Mean of Responses Questionnaire Part I

Question	Trustees	Senior Administrators	Principals	Teachers	All
1	1.83	1.78	1.78	1.82	1.81
2	1.33	1.67	1.79	1.70	1.71
3	1.67	2.22	2.00	1.78	1.86
4	1.67	1.22	1.14	1.42	1.33
5	1.50	1.89	1.50	1.72	1.67
6	1.33	1.56	1.36	1.55	1.49
7	2.00	2.33	2.21	2.19	2.20
8	2.00	2.22	2.19	2.28	2.24
9	1.50	1.56	1.55	1.64	1.61
10	1.33	1.67	1.83	1.86	1.83
11	1.83	2.22	1.88	1.90	1.91
12	1.33	1.44	1.64	1.63	1.61
13	1.67	1.78	2.05	2.12	2.06
14	2.00	1.56	1.88	2.06	1.98
15	2.33	2.11	1.98	2.18	2.13
16	1.83	1.78	2.10	2.31	2.21
17	2.00	2.44	2.24	2.27	2.26
18	2.00	1.78	1.98	2.21	2.11
19	1.50	1.78	1.81	1.82	1.80
20	1.83	2.22	1.90	1.96	1.95
21	1.83	1.89	1.88	2.09	2.01
22	1.50	1.67	1.50	1.64	1.60
23	1.67	1.44	1.29	1.33	1.32
24	2.83	2.33	2.26	2.57	2.49
25	2.33	2.33	1.93	2.14	2.10
26	3.00	2.67	2.26	2.45	2.43
27	3.00	3.00	2.68	2.90	2.85
28	1.50	1.89	1.66	1.80	1.76
29	2.17	3.00	2.31	2.41	2.41
30	2.00	2.11	2.10	2.35	2.28

APPENDIX F

QUESTIONNAIRE PART I

TABLE OF RANKINGS

Table 46
Ranking of Mean Responses Questionnaire Part I

Question	Trustees	Senior Administrators	Principals	Teachers	All
1	14	10	9	12	11
2	3	7	10	7	8
3	12	20	20	9	13
4	1	1	1	2	2
5	7	15	4	8	7
6	3	4	3	3	3
7	19	24	25	21	22
8	19	20	23	24	24
9	7	4	6	5	5
10	3	7	12	13	12
11	14	20	14	14	14
12	3	2	7	4	6
13	12	10	21	18	18
14	19	4	14	16	16
15	26	18	19	20	21
16	14	10	22	25	23
17	19	27	26	23	25
18	19	10	18	22	20
19	7	10	11	11	10
20	14	20	16	15	15
21	14	15	13	17	17
22	7	7	4	5	4
23	1	2	2	1	1
24	28	24	27	29	29
25	26	24	17	19	19
26	29	28	27	28	28
27	30	29	30	30	30
28	7	15	8	10	9
29	25	29	29	27	27
30	19	18	24	26	26